

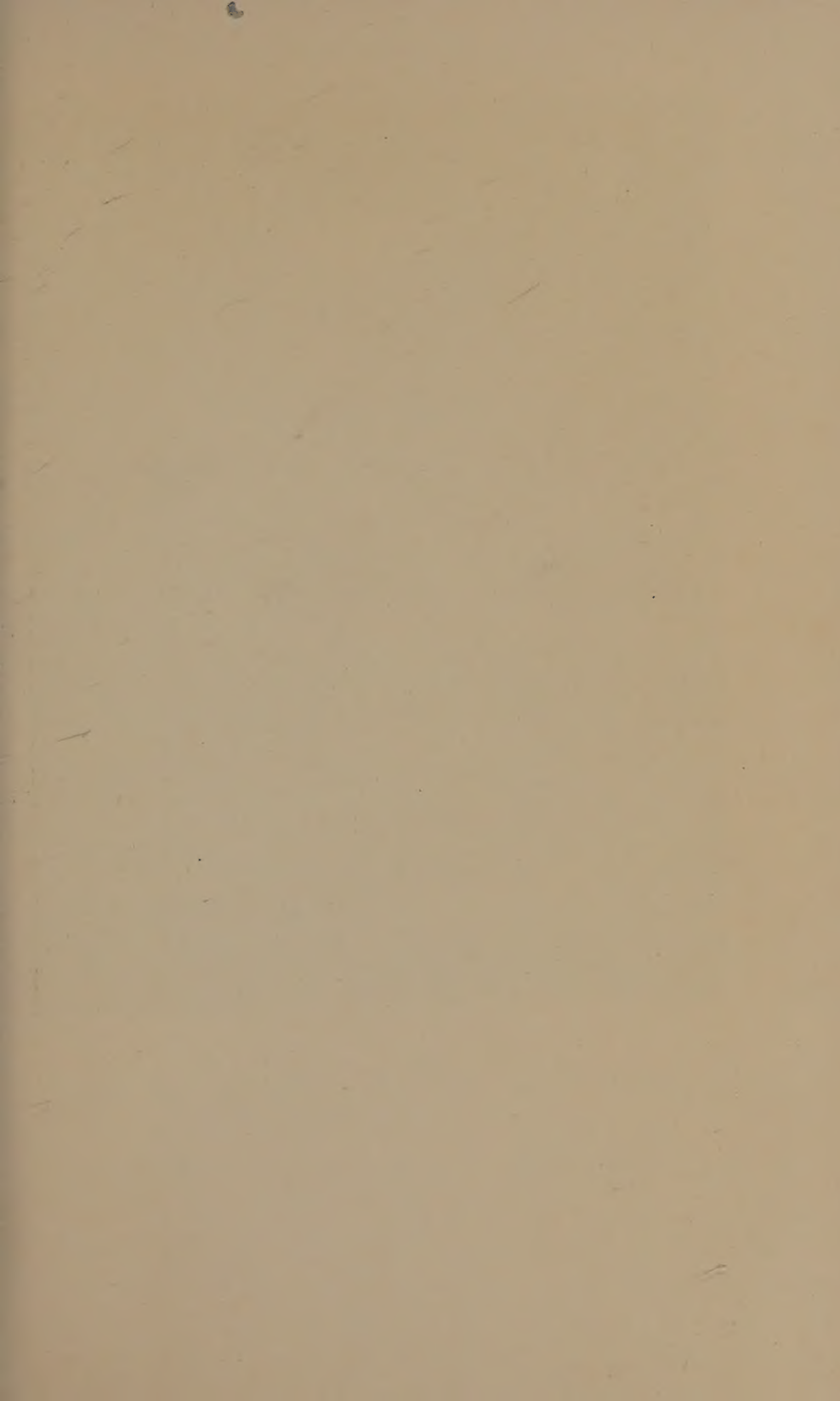
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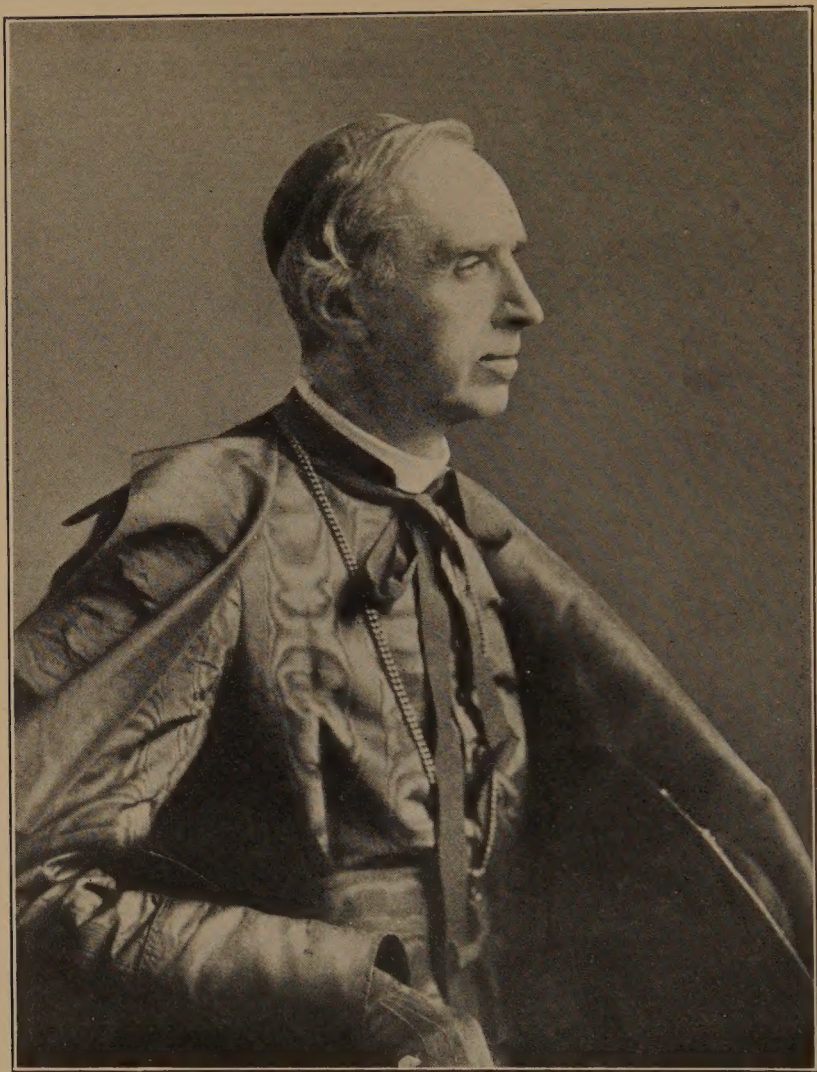
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* D. J. Card. Mace, Bishop of Melina.

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A Life of CARDINAL MERCIER

BY
MONSIGNOR LAVEILLE
VICAR-GENERAL OF MEAUX

TRANSLATED BY
ARTHUR LIVINGSTON



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310

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I THE FAMILY OF BARBE CROQUET	3
II THE STUDENT OF SAINT-ROMBAUT	12
III A LIGHT IN THE DARK AGES	33
IV A CHAIR AND A CANONICATE	54
V COMBAT	76
VI THE MIRACLE	102
VII THE ARCHBISHOP OF MALINES	128
VIII A FIGHTING CARDINAL	155
IX A WORLD'S IDOL	196
X THE SAINT	218

A LIFE OF CARDINAL MERCIER

A LIFE OF CARDINAL MERCIER

CHAPTER I

THE FAMILY OF BARBE CROQUET

IN the center of the plain of Waterloo, a few hundred yards from the battlefield where Napoleon's Eagle, already wounded, finally broke both its wings, stand the low, squatty, rectilinear houses of a big Walloon village, Braine-l'Alleud. A Muscovite spire perched on a massive church tower looks down upon these unprepossessing dwellings, which nevertheless suggest a plenteous prosperity. One of them in particular catches the eye. It stands at the end of the long, narrow market-place, and almost at the edge of the fields—a two-story building, solidly timbered, with a plain façade, and a roof almost flat. It is the little Château du Castégier, once a private residence but of late years restored and remodeled as a public center for various benevolent organizations. On November twenty-first, in the year 1851, it witnessed the birth of Desiré-Joseph Mercier.

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The Merciers had not originated in that region—in fact, they had been Belgians only since the year 1640. Before that time they belonged to the titled bourgeoisie of the Île-de-France—their coat of arms “a chevron *or* on azure, with three accosted roses, *argent*.” It is quite probable that Louis Mercier, the prolific writer who has left us a curious and picturesque “Tableau de Paris,” was related to this family.

What forced the Merciers of the seventeenth century to move to the Walloon plains? Their family history is silent on the point. Perhaps they were attracted thither simply by the reputation of those fine, fertile fields, which are a source of bounteous fortune to all who apply themselves to agriculture in the region. In any case, they made a success of their farming, and lived comfortably on this soil of Brabant, their adopted country.

At first they settled near Nivelles. Not till later did they lease land at Braine-l'Alleud.

The grandfather of Desiré-Joseph was the first to try his hand at business: to the cultivation of his farm he added a tannery. This prospered only for a time, however; though the income from his fields maintained a fair degree of ease in the family. This highly respected farmer administered the affairs of his little town for thirty-four years—he was commonly known as “the old mayor.”

This man's son, Paul-Léon Mercier, showed early in life that he had less practical tastes. His heart was set on painting, and if his father had not kept a sharp eye on him, he would have run off to Paris to perfect, in the studio of some master or other, a talent already hailed in its first gleams by a small number of enlightened friends. Chained to the paternal home, Paul-Léon Mercier sought compensation for the irksome restraint by devoting the best part of his time to literature and the arts, without concerning himself in the least with the prosperity of the family domain. Like all the other members of his house, he was singularly prone to noble, responsive enthusiasms. In 1830, he awakened to the thrill of patriotism, and with three other Merciers, relatives of his, hastened to Brussels to fire his shot in the cause of Belgian freedom. Then he returned to Braine and gave himself up again to his dreams.

His work as an amateur artist occupied him constantly, his natural talent enabling him, untaught, to produce pictures of some merit. There could be seen, not so long ago, in a small room that Cardinal Mercier used as an antechamber in his episcopal residence, a painting which always attracted the attention of callers with its quiet charm. It was a family group, most prominent the "old mayor," his earnest, strongly accentuated features reminding one of

his famous grandson; next, his wife, embracing her flock in affectionate gaze; finally, five children, among whom the artist himself. A dignified heirloom, surely, of a line that was to produce a prince of the Church!

Paul-Léon Mercier himself, however, preferred another of his works, the picture of a girl, fair-haired, with deep, clear eyes. This was a portrait of Barbe Croquet, as they used to say, who became the artist's wife. The girl was also of a family of farmers. She had a half-brother, Anthyme Charlier, who was to lead a distinguished ecclesiastical career as Dean of Virginal. The Charliers owned a farm which together with the adjoining estate of La Papelotte, the property of a Mercier, had been used as a base of operations by several German generals at the time of the final charge at Waterloo. Barbe had also a brother, Adrien Croquet, who was to be engaged for forty years as priest and bishop in preaching the gospel to the Indians of North America, and to win an attractive sobriquet as "the Saint of Oregon."

The young woman was in all respects the sister of such brothers. Industrious, methodical, pious to the point of taking communion frequently at a period when the practice was by no means held in high esteem, she was admired by her neighbors for

the religious zeal she displayed in bringing up her children. People liked to refer to her as "the saintly Madame Barbe."

The son who later on brought so much glory upon the family name once said on a day that marked supreme public recognition of his life and character: "My constant desire, my profound aspiration, was ever to be a better man myself and to lead morally upwards all those over whom I might have some influence. That this thirst for moral ascent was first instilled into me by my mother, I cannot doubt; and I am happy that a delicate allusion has afforded me opportunity to utter here the name of her to whom, after God, I owe the best part of myself: my mother, my sainted mother! From her example I learned, dimly, unconsciously at first, consciously and clearly later on, that true love consists in forgetfulness of self and in devotion to others. It was in her heart, in the serene strength of her high resolves, that I read the words of a great life lesson: that man is nothing; that success and adversity are nothing; that God alone matters. To expect anything of oneself is folly; to rely in the end only on God is wisdom itself. These, so far as I can remember, were the earliest guiding principles of my life."

The son who paid this tribute to a Christian mother was the fifth born in a family of seven—two other children had died in early infancy. The

rearing of this numerous brood was a stern task for the courageous woman. It was a stern task, too, for a poor amateur artist. Paul-Léon Mercier had, it is true, other and more lucrative means of support for his family; but ill-fortune seemed to pursue him. A distillery, on the profits from which he had counted to help him raise his children, failed, and he did not survive the disaster.

Upon the poor widow, burdened with seven fatherless children and deprived of all human support, there came overnight a problem as serious as it was unexpected. She was obliged to sell the comfortable old manor of Le Castégier, the shelter of the carved wooden cradle wherein she had rocked all her children. They took refuge, all eight of them, in a little house that stood in the very shadow of the church-spire. It was as though, in their great abandonment, they hoped that the Church might afford them consolation and relief.

The education of the children was prosecuted industriously under priests of Braine. Three of the little girls became nuns of conspicuous merit, one with the Sisters of Saint Clara, the other two in the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary. One of the boys, Léon, was able to complete university studies for the profession of medicine, and became a successful physician at Brussels.

In spite of the pecuniary difficulties of the family,

little Desiré-Joseph might have aspired like his brother to make his way in some worldly vocation. Among the family connections there was no lack of influential people to extend him a helping hand. One of his uncles was registrar at Hasselt; another was secretary-general in the Ministry of Finance; a first cousin, Édouard Mercier, was destined to become a cabinet minister three times. All this was enough to justify an expectation that young Desiré might one day be seen tranquilly seated in a comfortable swivel-chair at a desk in some important department of the government.

But quite different ambitions were stirring in the mind of the school-boy. The uncle, the Dean of Virginal, used to come now and then on visits to the modest household of the Merciers; and he was always fond of unbosoming himself with his relatives on the simple and austere joys which his ministry of souls procured for him. From time to time, moreover, letters would come in from the far-distant solitudes of Oregon, telling of the successes which at cost of privations and sufferings Father Croquet was obtaining among the savages scattered in the depths of the virgin American forests. These letters were the topic of evening discussions in the family; and as the boy, Desiré-Joseph, listened to the achievements of his uncles, a strange light would gleam in his eyes. The fire of apostleship was al-

ready beginning to glow in his ingenuous soul, and it was never to die out; for soon, Desiré-Joseph announced that he, too, desired to become a priest.

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Such aspirations had to be wisely guided, and there chanced to be in Braine-l'Alleud a vicar who had been following the first signs of young Mercier's vocation with keenest interest—the Abbé Oliviers. But Father Oliviers was not content with teaching little Desiré the catechism. He enlisted his services as choir-boy, and, perceiving in him a religious zeal equal to a very alert intelligence, he did not hesitate to instruct him in the rudiments of Latin. But the time soon came for the boy to part from his family and follow the course imposed upon him by his divine calling. Father Oliviers, appointed vicar at Our Lady-beyond-the-Dyle, was obliged to move from Braine to the episcopal city of Malines. What would become of the child if left to himself in a parish where at that time it was impossible to pursue classical studies to advantage? The good priest resolved to take the boy with him and to enter him as a day pupil at the Academy of Saint-Rombaut in Malines.

This was in November, 1863: Desiré-Joseph was then twelve years old.

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Here ended the rôle of the humble priest whose tender care, though he was far from suspecting it, had prepared the way for one of the most glorious careers of that episcopate. Forty-four years later, in the Church of Our Lady of Diest, the one-time choir-boy of Braine-l'Alleud, now a Cardinal, was to preside over the sacerdotal jubilee of the Abbé Oliviers, and to bear witness in a voice shaking with emotion to the immense gratitude he bore his former master. Who at that time could have told the aged priest, bent under the weight of his many years, that he would live through the injustices and the barbarities of an atrocious war to see the glory of his former choir-boy shine forth through all the world, and that, passing the age of ninety, he would himself survive the death of his beloved pupil?

CHAPTER II

THE STUDENT OF SAINT-ROMBAUT

THE Academy of Saint-Rombaut in Malines was one of the earliest "free" schools of classical studies to be founded in Belgium. Cardinal Dechamps was responsible for its establishment, and in 1863 it had just opened its doors in the city of the archbishopric. The rules and regulations adopted for the institution at its foundation would appear, from their tone of earnestness, to have been drawn up rather for serious-minded adults than for mere boys. That the scholars in attendance there should have been able to abide by them is greatly to their credit:

"What shall your watchwords be:

"1. Order at all times and in all places, for order leads to God; it is the best proof that we worship Him with that Fear which is the foundation of Knowledge.

"2. Obedience to the masters. Obey promptly and cheerfully, without questioning, without complaint; remember that obedience is the cardinal virtue of the good soldier, the missionary, the martyr.

"3. *Self-respect.* Watch over your pureness of heart, your uprightness of intention, your cleanliness of body and raiment; let your deeds be known of men and your thoughts of God.

"4. *Silence in chapel, in the class-room, in the ranks.* To keep silence is to show self-control and at the same time to find favor with God, who asks of us that concentration which is necessary for worthy labor and for spiritual upbuilding.

"5. *Behavior in Public.* The good name of an institution depends upon the conduct of its pupils outside its walls. Go to your homes or come to school by the most direct route; do not tarry in the streets or loiter before the shop-windows. Do not forget to tip your caps to people to whom such sign of respect is due. Associate with no one except your fellow-students. . . .

"6. *Christian charity.* Love one another; live like brethren; let there be one heart and one soul among you; be kindly toward your schoolmates. . . . Be thoughtful of others, and accept the faults of others with tolerance."

In any event, young Desiré Mercier made the spirit of the institution so completely his own that its austere maxims, cheerfully adopted and eagerly pursued, were later to make their influence felt in all the outstanding acts of his career as a priest.

Three of his teachers at Saint-Rombaut made a lasting and affectionate impression upon him—"M. Robert, who taught him to obey, M. La Force, who taught him to work and to will, M. Pieraerts, who taught him to dare."

Young Mercier found board and lodgings with the Misses Rydams, at Number 57, rue Notre-Dame. These ladies were pious spinsters of Flemish origin, and they spoke only their native tongue—a fact which might have tended to make the boy feel lonely and to estrange him from his hostesses. The actual effect was quite the opposite. With prescience, as it were, of his future, Desiré was eager to learn Flemish. He was delighted when he found himself obliged to speak that language, and he quickly mastered it. This accomplishment was to stand him in good stead later on as a powerful instrument in his apostolate.

What was Mercier's intimate life during these years at school which revealed to him the beauties of the ancient literatures and made him an adept in the French language? Only vague and infrequent bits of information are available on this period in his career—a dearth easily understandable. The boy was a day pupil. He appeared at the academy only at the hours of his recitations; and it never occurred to the excellent women in whose house he lived to take note of his daily acts and exploits.

We know, however, that when he had been at Saint-Rombaut about two years, young Desiré was made a member of the Congregation of the Holy Virgin, a distinction which presupposed special devotion to the Mother of Jesus on his part. The graduation program of the year 1868 furthermore reveals that in a class of eleven pupils in "rhetoric" he was holding second rank, while at the end of that academic year he was awarded prizes in "Christian doctrine," "elocution in Latin," and "translation from Latin." Decidedly original methods on the part of his Latin teacher at Saint-Rombaut may be inferred from an incident which Mercier himself related in after years:

"M. Pieraerts, after two weeks of classes in rhetoric, said to us one day:

" 'You are studying too much!'

" 'We've always been told the opposite,' we answered.

" 'You are getting to be so many grinds. Now just throw your dictionaries and your exercise books aside. You'll do nothing but read for a week!'

"He gave us a topic and directed the conversation. We soon began to realize that learning is not simply a matter of memorizing. He was always saying, in regard to commonplace things in life:

" 'Pshaw! That's a mere cherry-stem!'

"One day, a member of the class suggested his favorite phrase as a theme:

" 'Let's write on cherry-stems!'

" 'Well,' said he, 'life is fragile like the stem of a cherry. Yet the cherry-stem bears a piece of fruit—the cherry. . . . Our lives, likewise, must bear their cherries—the things we achieve.'

"It was a sharp reminder that anything may furnish matter for reflection. It proved an invaluable lesson for us!"

.

In spite of his distance from home, thoughts of his family were a constant stimulus to the school-boy's industry and zeal. He could see in his mind's eye the little house in Braine, and picture his three sisters toiling with his mother in a common effort to provide, by dint of economies and often indeed of privations, for his support. He was present, in imagination, at the daily prayers which, morning and evening, they raised to Heaven in his favor. And above all, whenever vacations set him free, his first thought would be to hasten back to the home where an atmosphere of love and gentleness favored all his impulses toward piety and religious fervor.

But the child had not been raised in a hothouse. Perception of the hardships of his own family taught him early in life to sympathize with others, giving him, along with a sense of affectionate comradeship,

an instinctive interest in the plans and hopes of young men who like himself came from hard-working families. Such feelings, combined with the natural exuberance of spirit that inclines every fifteen-year-old boy toward physical activities, induced Desiré Mercier to become a vacation companion of the young workingmen of Braine-l'Alleud organized in the Catholic Association of St. François Xavier. Rivaling the Xaverians was another so-called "liberal" group in the same town, which had invented the nickname of "Mamelukes" for its Catholic competitors. The Xaverians not only accepted the epithet but showed themselves proud of it, Desiré Mercier even more than the others.

The Mamelukes were a jolly company. Every Sunday they would all set out together along the Estrée road to imbibe a few mugs of beer in good fellowship, or to "engage," as the Cardinal himself writes, "in games and sports, now at piquet, now at ninepins, for prizes which would be now a rabbit, now a brace of pigeons." Desiré took part in these contests in a most natural and genial manner. He worked hard for the rabbit. Sometimes he even won it. Then, the evenings would be devoted to long conversations, sometimes dealing with grave problems which were later to form some of the Cardinal's most serious preoccupations. To these discussions, carried on in a very spirited fashion, he owed

some of that self-confidence he always showed in argument. One day delegates of the Socialist Internationale of Brussels came to Braine-l'Alleud and challenged the Xaverians to a debate. The latter won the vote of the judges, to the great joy of Desiré Mercier, who could hardly contain his satisfaction at the triumph of certain ideas on the social question to which he was already devoted at that early age.

The rather austere conceptions of life propounded and debated in this club of St. François Xavier, gave Mercier a first and still distant glimpse of the problems of philosophy, of which it was time for him to begin systematic study.

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A change of institutions was now essential; for the curriculum at Saint-Rombaut did not carry the student beyond the languages and composition. On the first of October, 1868, he was admitted to the Petit-Séminaire of Malines, to follow a two-year course in philosophy preparatory to more specifically ecclesiastical studies.

Nothing could have been more severe in aspect than the buildings which were now to be his residence for long months at a time. As the future priests entered the somber Courtyard of St. Catherine, girt with ancient structures containing dormitories and class-rooms, the windows all in line, they

must have felt already cut off from the world, and as it were weaned forever from its vanities. Fifty-three young men began "philosophy" in Desiré Mercier's class. They came from all parts of the diocese, from the lower grades of the Petit-Séminaire itself, from Basse-Wavre, from Hoogstraeten, from academies in Brussels and Antwerp, from Saint-Rombaut in Malines. It did not take long for the young man with the tall, erect figure and the clear, sharp eyes, to distinguish himself among his fellows and to win every one's confidence by his sweet and engaging smile.

The austere atmosphere of the Lower Seminary was at that moment gloomier than ever because of the recent death of Canon de Bleser, headmaster of the institution, who had been killed in an accident. His successor, Father du Rousseaux, tended at first to overawe new-comers by the sternness of his demeanor, though in the end he would win them by his kindness.

Soon, however, the future Cardinal found this new environment congenial, if not to physical comfort, at least to his mental and spiritual needs. The principal concern of the new headmaster was to ground the candidates for the priesthood in a religious spirit sturdy enough to withstand whatever trials might later assail it. He himself set an example of life as deeply absorbed in communion with

God as it was prompt in the performance of the present duty.

The effect of such an influence was to strengthen in Mercier an aspiration for perfection which at this time began to stand out in sharp relief in his personality. At Malines the future Cardinal set a high ideal for himself and began to pursue it: not after the manner of so many young dreamers, who are satisfied when they have long paraded some fancy through an imagination incapable of real accomplishment; but rather after the manner of the pioneer, who surmounts a new obstacle each day in a steadfast effort to reach a goal he has fixed as a test for his endurance. It was his own experience that he drew upon later on in life, when he declared in a famous "talk" designed to encourage other students along the road to the Beautiful and the Good:

"An ideal is a very distinct, a clearly defined thing—it is a lucid conception of a duty, to which we must remain faithful, and which we must never abandon."

But young Mercier felt that it was futile, even for an energetic and persevering will, to aspire to the summits, when the summits sought were those of ultrahuman perfection and of priestly saintliness, unless that aspiration were fertilized by prayer. In his very first year in the Lower Seminary, Desiré Mercier was a model to his fellow-students, for

the concentration with which he entered into prayer and the fervor of his worship in the presence of the Host. On this point one of the three or four surviving witnesses of that period of his life has left us testimony that deserves quotation.

Says Father Oudens: "In the portrait by the artist Josef Janssens of Antwerp, the illustrious Cardinal is shown in the choir of his metropolitan church, on his knees, in an attitude of fervent prayer. That was his posture at prayer from the very beginning of his stay in the seminary at Malines. For four years we had the good fortune to observe him in just that way—always that same pious absorption, when attending divine service, which is so noteworthy in him to-day! He never took his eyes from the altar. His genuflexion before the Host as he entered chapel was always an act of living faith—never a hurried or perfunctory gesture of routine. And as we saw him returning from the communion-table, we would say to each other: 'That is the way Louis Gonzaga or Berchmann must have taken communion!' We would all have desired to commune with like earnestness."

Speaking of the admirable pastoral "retreats" which Mercier, as Archbishop, and then Cardinal, of Malines, was later to preach to his subordinates, and to which Father Oudens himself had listened when a curate, the same witness says:

"In all of us he kindled a spark of the sacred fire which burned so brightly in his own heart; but those of us who had been fellow-students of his in the seminary knew that these lectures on the spiritual life were merely the theoretical expression of an actual example he had given during his years of preparation for the priesthood—the example of a gentle, a charming, an unassuming piety."

Such sincerity could not fail to accentuate the attractive features of the young man's personality. Great gentleness of manner, unmistakably the sign of a real kindness of heart, had always distinguished Mercier as a boy. At Malines these qualities seemed to expand to full blossom in his contacts from day to day with the comrades whose lives he was sharing.

Yet there was nothing deliberate or premeditated, nothing stiff or constrained, in his behavior. During hours of recreation Mercier entered into the spirit of fun with all his heart, and his good-natured, open-hearted smile was an incitement to others to do likewise. He was always one of the gayest of any group, fond especially of the witty rejoinder, of the inoffensive prank, of radiant good-humor. And these were traits which comrades of his days at school were to recognize in him all his life long. As years went by, graduates of his generation at the Lower Seminary would call on him in his palace at Malines, and invariably went away with one feeling;

"High offices and honors have not changed our old schoolmate in the slightest!"

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It could not have been a simple matter for Desiré Mercier to preserve a smiling countenance in that institution whither he had come athirst for intellectual enlightenment and for examples of virtuous living. He had a natively keen intelligence, which inclined him to successful exploration of metaphysical problems. At the same time his was a mind which imperiously demanded clear ideas and orderly and logical exposition. As a matter of fact, the philosophy taught in its elements in the lower and higher seminaries of both Belgium and France about the year 1868 showed the effects of the bewilderment into which a multiplicity of systems had thrown the principal thinkers of the nineteenth century. The manuals then in use in Church schools usually borrowed their main lines of doctrine from Descartes; but in the important problem of the foundations of knowledge, they inclined toward the traditionalism of Lamennais or the diluted ontologism of Ubaghs and Branchereau, both of these condemned, or at least disapproved, by Rome. Of the philosophy which had guided the great theologians of the Middle Ages—the scholastic doctrine as expounded by Saint Thomas—not a word, unless to dismiss it in a few vague or depreciatory phrases.

In the presence of such disparate theses devoid of logical connection with each other, the teacher had to do the best he could. When, as was usually the case, he had no personal outlook, what principles could he give his students to organize the facts they would soon be acquiring? Yet could it be that philosophy, that crown of classical learning, that science which was expected to demonstrate the ultimate and supreme rationality of life, was nothing but an agglomeration of hypothetical and contradictory postulates?

Young Mercier was painfully groping his way through the fog of this vague eclecticism, when Providence came to the aid of his ardent desire for knowledge. An English student at the seminary, the future Father Richardson, had brought to school with him a manual of philosophy written in Latin; and the budding philosopher from Braine-l'Alleud thought he saw in it the compass that would guide him to less turbid skies. The "*Prælectiones Philosophicæ*" of Father Tongiorgi were not inspired by pure Thomism—the author frequently borrowed from other systems; but he expounded scholastic philosophy with sufficient clarity and detail for Désiré Mercier to recognize in it that natural, rational, and coherent explanation of the universe for which his inquisitive mind had been searching for so many months.

The book of the Italian philosopher was a source of intimate, secret joys for him. He could not utilize his new discoveries, either in his daily answers in class or in his written examinations. On the other hand, how could he expound convincingly or even make serious effort to memorize systems which he felt to be erroneous? This embarrassment accounts for the fact that, excellent student though he was, the future prince of Belgian philosophers did not always succeed in holding first rank in this humble class in elementary philosophy. Father Oudens suggests as much, while paying full homage at the same time to Mercier's eminent intellectual endowments.

"In his passion for study," says Oudens, "and, in general, in his liking for hard work, Desiré Mercier was a salutary example for all of us. Despite his quick and retentive memory and his penetrating understanding of the most involved questions of philosophy (capacities which might well have excited the envy of his comrades), he never displayed any bitter eagerness to shine, or to outstrip competitors, in a feverish race for factitious distinctions. He won some personal triumphs, as did others of the better students in his courses, but without ever becoming vain; and he was able, on occasion, to experience sincere satisfaction at successes on the part of his friends."

As in most ecclesiastical institutions, the Lower

Seminary at Malines held certain public assemblies where the purpose was to train the students in correct Latin diction and incidentally to exhibit before select audiences the better compositions produced in the school. For the students of philosophy the exercise consisted of formal debates on points of philosophical doctrine. Desiré Mercier had the honor of being named champion three times in these intellectual struggles, a foretaste of those which were to play so large a part in his later life. From the seriousness with which he took the defense of his theses, Cardinal Dechamps, the presiding chairman, was able to foresee his career as a thinker and as a man of action.

His two years of "philosophy" completed, young Mercier was ready for the Upper Seminary, to which he was admitted on the first Sunday of October, in the year 1870. That was the feast-day of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary.

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Sedan had fallen just previously, and echoes of the complaints of wounded France, as well as of the haughty exultance of Germany, penetrated even to the seclusion of the Seminary at Malines. The old French blood of the Merciers boiled in the young student's veins, and he felt growing within him an invincible mistrust for a people that seemed to be intoxicated with its ephemeral supremacy, and to be

stifling all sentiments of pity under the cult of force. But such thoughts he had to banish from his mind if he were to enter whole-heartedly upon his work in the solitude of the Upper Seminary.

It was on the very day of his admission, just before matins, that Desiré Mercier donned the cassock for the first time. This ceremony marked his solemn farewell to the world, and his formal repudiation of its vestments. His impressions on that occasion he was himself to describe years later. The moment he found himself alone within the four white walls of his modest cell, he fell to his knees, and, overflowing with joy, clasping his crucifix to his heart, he repeated the song of the Psalmist: *Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine . . .* "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts . . . A day in thy courts is worth a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

The life the students led at the Grand-Séminaire of Malines was in no sense calculated to modify the impression of austerity left by the exterior of the buildings upon one who sees them for the first time. There was nothing to suggest ease or luxury or even to humor concern for physical comforts. Great, cold, bare corridors; small, cramped cells, only a few with fireplaces; one room only heated in winter—the common hall; class-rooms, a refectory,

a chapel that never saw a fire: such the régime at Mercier's new school! The idea was to train the future priests in habits of abnegation and sacrifice, to accustom their physical selves, from the very outset, to self-denial and hardship.

Without hesitation and without complaint, Desiré Mercier strode forth along the arduous path that leads to the altar. Every morning he could be seen with a smock thrown over his cassock, making his bed and sweeping his room, or lending a hand good-humoredly at all the extra chores which arose from time to time in connection with the festivals. His was essentially a monastic soul. He joyfully adapted himself to his little whitewashed chamber, with its iron bed, its two chairs, its plain pine desk—its sole adornment the crucifix, of which, in loving contemplation, he was fain to ask that light which books did not always give him. It was in the Upper Seminary at Malines that Mercier acquired a devotion to evangelical poverty which in the years to come neither eminence nor honors, nor even the splendor of the cardinal's purple, was ever to weaken. Meantime, the traits of conduct which had distinguished him during his residence in the Petit-Séminaire—his punctuality at all services, his fervor and concentration at prayer and at communion—were accentuated, rather than not, in this higher school.

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Study of theology now more than repaid him for the hours of futile labor which had seemed so long to him before. This science, with its method of deduction based on the unshakable authority of the revealed Word, satisfied the demand for logic and clarity which was one of the characteristics of his mind. Mercier, however, craved a more solidly articulated synthesis of the propositions which gradually came forth from study of the manuals. He already knew, through Tongiorgi, that no one had ever surpassed St. Thomas in the effort to construct a rational system; and he resolved to complete with the help of the "*Summa Theologiæ*" the often too summary expositions furnished by the elementary textbooks then in use in ecclesiastical schools.

The undertaking was a bold one. In his masterly work St. Thomas does indeed treat most of the questions considered by modern professors of philosophy. But he does not approach them in the order now commonly accepted, nor does his plan follow the lines of our theological syllabi. The language furthermore which he uses, in common with all the masters of his day, is a highly technical one, often enough incomprehensible to any except the initiated. Left to his own resources in such a matter, how was a young student in theology to overcome such great difficulties?

To be sure Tongiorgi had given him a first

introduction to Thomist doctrine; but the eclectic tendencies of that Italian author might easily have led some minds astray. It was Mercier's good fortune to come upon another book, which rendered his task appreciably easier: the French translation of Kleutgen's "Exposition and Defense of Scholastic Philosophy." This work, by a German Jesuit, was a thorough and scholarly interpretation, as well as a brilliant defense, of the Thomist system. Desiré Mercier made of it his favorite reading. Through it he obtained a solid grounding in the medieval philosophy and was enabled to read the "Summa" with profit from very early days in the Grand-Séminaire. Mercier desired, moreover, something better than mere intellectual mastery in the theological sciences.

"His frequent contact with the Fathers of the Church," says M. Goyau, "his daily intimacy with St. Paul, tended to make of him, by no means just a specialist in sacred scholarship, but an apostle of Jesus. If he learned the Epistles by heart, if in his note-books at school he began translations of them in that very personal manner of his which seems to press the very substance from them, it was not for purposes of exegesis: it was rather to saturate his soul with those noble thoughts which created the moral atmosphere of primitive Christianity.

"He was educating himself for the sake of the

souls he would one day have to educate, and he looked upon study, not as an enjoyment for the brain, but as an apprenticeship for action. His intellectual labors were wholly subordinate to his calling. He deliberately turned away from broad and inviting horizons which sudden but deep-reaching flashes of vision revealed to him; he systematically humbled within himself such desires and aspirations as did not tend in all respects toward perfecting a future priest. His three years in the seminary all looked ahead to that half-hour on an April morning of the year 1874, when, for the first time, he celebrated communion. 'To the God who filled my youth with joy,' he wrote on the *Memento* of his ordination; and his 'youth in its joy' yearned only for a post as parish priest, whence he might bestow upon others the Word and the life of God, and bring into daily reality 'that moment which is unique in the world—the eucharistic sacrifice!'

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A few months after his admission to the Upper Seminary, young Mercier was judged worthy to take the first steps toward holy orders. He received the tonsure from the hands of Monsignor Anthonis, headmaster of the Grand-Séminaire and Bishop Co-adjutor of Malines, during the octave of Pentecost in the year 1871. Those first bonds of "fellowship with the Supreme Priest" seemed to fan to hotter

glow the flame which shone in his eyes whenever he was in the presence of the Host; and in attitude and gesture the young clerk more ardently sought a resemblance to Jesus the Christ.

Some of the most important functions in the seminary were now entrusted to his care. He was named subdeacon, and also, at pontifical services, assistant in ceremonies to the archbishop. Meantime Canon du Rousseaux happened to be in need of a substitute teacher in the Lower Seminary; foreseeing the influence which Abbé Mercier would exercise over students by virtue of the esteem in which he was held for his kindliness and his qualities of leadership, he succeeded in having him appointed to the post temporarily vacant. Though he was the youngest man in his class, Mercier served as dean in the institution which had given him his own training, from January 19, 1873, to the end of that academic year.

This term completed, he asked only to return to his studious refuge; but the authorities had remarked his extraordinary powers of assimilation and his subtle, penetrating intelligence. It was decided that he should finish his preparation for ordination at the University of Louvain and then be left there to pursue advanced studies.

CHAPTER III

A LIGHT IN THE DARK AGES

IN the intellectual capital of Belgium, which possessed the most celebrated and the best organized Catholic university in Europe, young Abbé Mercier might have hoped to find a philosophy taught officially, and to be relied upon as a safe and solid foundation for the theology of which he had mastered the general principles. Philosophy was indeed held in high honor at Louvain. The university had even developed, toward the middle of the nineteenth century, an original, if not exactly an independent, school of thinking of which a saintly priest, the Abbé Ubaghs, was the leading figure.

That was a period of spiritualistic and dogmatic reaction against the empiricism which had flourished in France at the end of the eighteenth century, and against Kantian criticism which was just beginning to invade Belgium. The traditionalism, furthermore, of Bonald, Bautain, and Lamennais had not been spared by Roman censure; whereupon a number of thinkers, more ingenious than pro-

found, conceived the idea of linking the old classic spiritualism with Malebranche. An era of analytical metaphysics, of ontologism, began, supported in Belgium by Ubaghs, principally, and by Rector La-forêt. But for a second time the Holy See had to declare, regretfully but unmistakably, that salvation was not to be sought in these new directions.

When Desiré Mercier arrived at Louvain, the university had not recovered from this last blow; and the professors there, not quite sure of themselves, wavering between one system and another, were unable to present a homogeneous and closely knit body of doctrine. Errors indeed were combated with a dialectic sharp and vigorous enough. But when it came to replacing error with something definite and constructive, hesitation and embarrassment began.

This situation became startlingly apparent one day when Mercier was called upon by one of his teachers to make a refutation of Comte's positivism. Carried along by the logic of his own thought, the young student advanced without warning far beyond the horizons of his professor. The audience was amazed. So far as Mercier was concerned, the day of the old compromises was over. His mind required a metaphysical system truly coördinated and synthesized. Modestly and quietly

he plunged again into his Kleutgen and once more resolved in future to seek in St. Thomas, whom the German scholar had brought within his reach, solutions of the principal problems indicated in the university curriculum.

His perfect simplicity, his smiling affability, his eagerness to be of service, gained ready and whole-hearted acceptance of his intellectual ascendancy at Louvain. The authorities decided, indeed, at the very beginning of his stay there, to make practical use of his enthusiasm and his qualities of character. There was, as there still is, in the city, a *pension* named, in memory of its founder, the "College of Pope Hadrian VI." Its president at the time was Monsignor Jacobs. It housed lay students of law and medicine in residence at the university. Abbé Mercier was invited to assume, in addition to his studies, a friendly supervision over these young men, with the title of Assistant Regent.

This temporary contact with young scientists was to have its effect on his own development. In the intervals between hours of study, many discussions arose between the young theologian and students who were trained as a matter of professional routine to observe physiological phenomena in minute detail. It became apparent to Abbé Mercier that modern science had discovered or explained no end of facts which the philosophers of

the Middle Ages had either not known at all or else inadequately appreciated. If one were to revert to Thomist metaphysics, must not a way be found to reconcile its theories with discoveries the importance and the utility of which could not be denied? The idea of a neo-Thomism budded in Abbé Mercier's mind at the College of Pope Hadrian VI. Time and toil were to bring it later to fruition.

The young clerk had recently received major orders, but he was not yet a priest. However, one of the duties of the assistant regent of "The Pope's College" was to celebrate a daily mass in the chapel there, so as to encourage piety on the part of the students. Abbé Mercier was not old enough to share in the ordinations that took place at Christmastide of the year 1873. It was accordingly arranged that the priesthood be conferred upon him on Holy Saturday, April 4, 1874.

It chanced that Cardinal Dechamps, Archbishop of Malines, was not free on that day, and so in order to receive holy unction the young deacon had to apply to the papal nuncio in Belgium, Monsignor Cattani. The rites were performed in the chapel of the nuncio's residence. The auditor who assisted the prelate on that occasion was the future Cardinal Vincenzo Vannutelli, later dean of the Sacred Col-

lege, who always recalled that particular ordination with deep emotion.

The next day was Easter; and Desiré Mercier hurried home to Braine-l'Alleud, his native village. There he was welcomed by the smiles of his admiring townspeople, by a joyous pealing of the new bells in the sturdy church tower, by a countryside fragrant with blossoming lilacs; and moving in a procession through the town he made his way to the altar where he had taken his first communion, to celebrate his first mass. Most of those who had done their bit in preparation for that glorious day were on hand to escort him to this solemn rendezvous with the "God who had filled his youth with joy": his brother, destined like himself to a liberal career; his sisters, who, before beginning their permanent residence in their convents, had insisted on earning to the very end to help their family give a priest to the Church; the old vicar, Father Oliviers, who had started Mercier on his way to the altar. There was only one dark cloud to cast a shadow over this atmosphere of rejoicing. The heroic Madame Mercier was unable to attend—she had just suffered a stroke! The danger, happily, was but a temporary one. The mother of the young priest was to recover her health and live long enough to witness the first dawning of her son's glory (she died in 1882).

However, Abbé Mercier's presence was urgently required at the university and at "The Pope's College." He returned to Louvain to place his new powers at the service of the students, and to prepare himself with renewed ardor for the examinations which would advance him toward his academic degrees. The doctorate in theology at Louvain required long years of study. That was why it was regarded with such special esteem in high ecclesiastical spheres. Abbé Mercier set about preparing for his tests with the conscientiousness which, in his eyes, mastery of the sacred sciences deserved. He had carried off his diplomas as bachelor and master in theology under heavy fire and with loud applause from his teachers. Now, in July of the year 1877, the public defense of his doctoral thesis was to prove an intellectual treat for the university and, for the candidate himself, a personal triumph.

That occasion marked the end of Mercier's life as a student. Being a doctor, he was by definition fitted to teach. The authorities were careful not to overlook the fact.

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During the few months of the year 1873 which the Abbé Mercier had spent as substitute in the Petit-Séminaire at Malines, the headmaster, M. du Rousseaux, had observed in him qualities of judgment and tact which, combined with deep piety and

sound scholarship, had given him from the very first remarkable influence over his pupils. The young priest's successes in the course of the following years had served to heighten that esteem. When, therefore, in 1877, the professor of philosophy in the Lower Seminary became head canon, M. du Rousseaux requested Cardinal Dechamps to name the former student of Malines to fill the vacant chair. So it came about that, at the opening of the school year in October, Abbé Mercier assumed that very desirable position which seemed to offer him promise of a long career as a teacher of philosophy. He was then twenty-six years old.

What system would he offer his pupils? Since the days when Tongiorgi's manual had given him some knowledge of Thomism, scholastic philosophy had been gaining ground everywhere. It had already been restored to favor in the principal Italian seminaries through the works of Canon Sanseverino and Father Liberatore. In France, too, if Abbé Mercier had been called to teach there, he would not have found himself alone in an effort to revive medieval thought. As early as 1860 elementary textbooks, such as those of Grandclaude and Rosset, had introduced scholastic learning into that country. The manual of Farges and Barbedette, still in use in most Sulpician seminaries, appeared in its first edition in the year 1874.

But the young professor was to teach at Malines where the sporadic efforts of French and Italian Thomists were either unknown or frowned upon. To take the initiative in so weighty a reform, even in a lower seminary, assumed in a young man of twenty-six a high degree of courage. Fortunately M. du Rousseaux placed absolute reliance on Mercier's competence and good judgment. The headmaster not only let him have his own way but even encouraged him. He set bravely to work.

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The buildings of the Petit-Séminaire of Malines did not have, forty years ago, the inviting appearance and the vast proportions which they display to-day. The room assigned to the courses in philosophy was low, dark, dingy. The narrow windows, protected by thick gratings against turbulent pranks on the part of the students, allowed but a few wan rays of sunlight to filter within. But in those days no one gave any thought to comforts in Church boarding-schools; and Abbé Mercier, in particular, was from the start the kind of man to lift the minds of his students above all material preoccupations.

It is not difficult to imagine the scene which all his students so well remember. Assembled every morning in this somewhat funereal class-room, the young men awaited the arrival of the professor. In pensive silence Abbé Mercier appeared—it was

like a ray of light and of joy. Thoughtful, however, his arms filled with books, he made his way to his desk, lowered his eyes for a moment to collect his thoughts, and then, in reverent demeanor, recited the usual invocation to the Holy Spirit. Hardly had he begun his lecture when one could see how completely he had mastered his material. Unusual skill was required to bring home to twenty-year-old boys such far-away abstractions, such finely drawn reasonings, expressed originally in a language often judged obsolete. Like a shrewd teacher thoroughly versed in his subject, he managed to elucidate the most complex theories by simple comparisons, familiar examples. To clarity and simplicity of exposition he added precise diction, systematic procedure, along with an animated tone of voice, commanding the attention of every one and making the hardest subject seem easy. Gentle, friendly, Professor Mercier was just an older comrade among younger ones. His students all adored him.

His course was divided into two sections, corresponding to the two years devoted to the subject in the Lower Seminary, the second-year students forming what is still called the "advanced course." Abbé Mercier was, however, aware that it was not sufficient to impart knowledge, even if this were done clearly and methodically. It was just as important that the students themselves be able to express

what they had grasped and assimilated. That was why he organized, on his own initiative, the "philosophical clubs" at Malines.

Each Sunday, during the study-hour which preceded recess, the young men in the lower section would meet in groups of ten or twelve under the presidency of honor students of the advanced courses. Some question relating to subjects recently studied had been previously assigned as "the order of the day"; the topic chosen would give rise to searching discussion among the the seminarists. If a chairman needed help in conducting the debate to the best advantage, he would consult the professor beforehand. Abbé Mercier, who usually attended, would give the floor successively to all those who thought they had something to contribute. Walking up and down among the students, he would follow the debate attentively, approving the good replies, correcting or amplifying others. All had practice in expressing their thoughts easily and clearly, and went away at the end of the hour with a new fund of ideas and a keener thirst for knowledge.

"How well and how pleasantly we remember those Sunday meetings!" one of the students of those days writes. "Doubtless in the ardor of our youth we were at times carried away into somewhat Homeric, not to say inopportune, language. But al-

ways, thanks to the professor's kindly supervision, the most fraternal spirit reigned among us."

But on being admitted to the priesthood, Mercier had dreamt of something other than an intellectual career. He had promised himself, and he had promised God, to be an apostle in the fullest meaning of the word, in all possible ways and to the very end of his life. When, therefore, Monsignor du Rousseaux left the Petit-Séminaire to become Bishop of Tournai, and Canon Mangelschots replaced him as headmaster of the Lower Seminary, the young professor accepted with the most profound satisfaction the position of spiritual adviser to the future candidates for ordination.

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Mercier was very young, it is true, to act in this capacity toward men almost as old as himself, and above all to pass judgment on ecclesiastical vocations. But the prestige of his virtues and the charm of his charitable spirit drew hearts spontaneously toward him. He soon possessed the implicit confidence of the one hundred and fifty youths who made up the school. No effort was too great when he had an opportunity to enlighten or to encourage his beloved students or to confirm one of them in union with God. The authority he enjoyed from his recognized scholarship, his perspicacity, and his tact more

than offset anything lacking in him on the score of age.

"Who does not remember," writes the same student, "the truly paternal welcome he used to give us when we went to confide our anxieties to him—our family troubles, our inner perplexities, our doubts concerning our calling? M. Mercier listened patiently, encouraged us to open our hearts when we seemed to be hesitating, immediately grasped, with his keen insight, the nature of our worries when we had described them imperfectly, and at once suggested some efficacious remedy. God alone, the sole witness of these intimate conversations, would be able to tell how much sadness he consoled, how many hearts he inspired, how many doubts he dispelled."

In his work as spiritual director, Abbé Mercier by no means urged all those who confided in him to continue toward the priesthood. His insight and his firmness were as great as his kindliness; and he did not hesitate to guide toward a mundane career any aspirant whom he found mistaken as to the nature of his calling. Believing the point of departure for all progress toward true piety to be regular and assiduous meditation, Abbé Mercier had no peer in persuading his students to practise it, in helping them over its difficulties, in enabling them to enjoy its blessings. Next in importance after study of the great masters of spiritual life, and almost on a level

with prayer, he recommended the practice of self-examination; and, himself a gentle and benevolent priest, he urged that such examination dwell in particular upon "mortification," or the humbling of pride. So striking and so personal were his exhortations on this subject that some of them were brought together in a sort of tract by students who had benefited by them. This pamphlet—"Concerning Christian Mortification, by a former Spiritual Director of a Seminary"—was widely read among the Belgian clergy of a generation ago. Some of its admonitions, their profound wisdom emphasized by the convincing imperatives in which they were expressed, show something of the temper of the man:

"The moment you feel that your body is in the slightest degree disposed to play the master, straightway treat it as a slave.

"Humiliate your imagination when it would seduce you with the lure of some conspicuous position, when it would depress you with the prospect of an obscure future, when it would irritate you with the memory of some word or act that may have hurt you.

"Avoid obstinacy in your ideas, stubbornness in your opinions. Cheerfully allow the views of others to prevail, unless there be at stake some issue on which it is your bounden duty to speak your mind.

"Above all else—and this is the crucial point

—humble your own will! Bring it constantly to yield before what you know to be God's good pleasure and the order of His Wisdom, regardless of your own likes and dislikes, your own desires or aversions. Yield even to your inferiors in matters which do not concern the glory of God and the duties of your curacy."

To presume to speak in such terms, Abbé Mercier must have felt himself completely liberated from the sway of natural instincts and, consequently, to be in close union with God. One day of each month saw the recurrence of an exercise in which the spirituality of the youthful confessor made itself even more potently manifest, if that were possible. It was an exercise in "spiritual contemplation." On that occasion he asked his seminarists to engage in profound meditation all day long and to concentrate particularly on the presence of God. But the decisive moment for spiritual regeneration came at the evening lecture which was followed by the "preparation for death." Motionless, his hands clasped, his eyes half-closed in inward gaze upon some divine reality, the young priest would begin to speak, very slowly, with such impressive genuineness, such evident faith, that a tremor of Divine Love would vibrate through all his hearers. Complete silence would reign throughout the hall and continue after he had uttered his final words, as

though all were trying to stamp his message indelibly upon their hearts. And, the next day, the hundred and fifty students would go about, like the disciples after the supper in Emmaus, repeating to one another: "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?"

And, stirred to the very depths of their being, they would encourage each other to new efforts toward the ideal which they had glimpsed.

Abbé Mercier at that time cherished no other ambition than to pass several years in the tranquillity of the Petit-Séminaire at Malines in the service of young men so dear to him. To prepare worthy priests for that diocese seemed in his eyes a magnificent and meritorious task for a man. But his aim was a future priest educated as well as saintly, and while teaching the philosophical system which he considered closest to the spirit of the Church because best adapted to the scheme of its dogmas, he kept asking himself, and not without anxiety, just how successful that system would prove for the student later on in withstanding the shock of contrary opinions, or, indeed, in resisting the sheer inertia of ignorance in circles unaffected as yet by Thomist views.

Since his recent accession, Pope Leo XIII had been constantly urging the Catholic world to return to the philosophy of the Middle Ages. Weary of

the sterile speculations which for two centuries past had been tossing Christian thought back and forth between the presumptuous audacities of Cartesianism on the one hand and the anti-intellectual tendencies of ontologists and fideists on the other, the Pope was determined to put an end forever to all such incoherent efforts. The Church possessed, in the treasury of its traditions, a philosophy as solidly grounded in rationality as it was marvelously harmonious with Church dogmas! He planned to restore it.

That philosophy, as we have already remarked, was indeed not unknown in Italy, and it was beginning to make its way in France; but in both those countries it was still accessible only in the abridgements, not to say the disfigurations, of elementary textbooks. Leo XIII wished it to be known in its authentic sources and especially in the works of the man whose broad and penetrating genius had won him, in truly Christian centuries, the epithet of "Angelic Doctor." Not that His Holiness was concerned to exhume, for the satisfaction of archeologists themselves ignorant of it, a congealed or petrified metaphysic. His hope rather was to give new life to scholastic method by bringing it into contact with facts, to demonstrate its accord with the most recent discoveries of science, and thereby to make it the foundation of vital, contemporary thinking. In this

way he hoped he could bring modern minds back to a Christian faith and cure social anarchy by first curing anarchy in thought.

The enterprise was a formidable one. It meant upsetting an entire world. How make minds infatuated with modern scientific achievements accept as guiding principles the theses of a doctor who had disappeared from the face of the earth more than six centuries before, whose very name, indeed, was all but unknown to any number of scholars? How propagate, even through the clergy of Europe and the New World, doctrines evolved in so-called Dark Ages and apparently incomprehensible because couched in a Latin judged barbaric?

Leo XIII remembered that at the beginning of his career he had been papal nuncio in Belgium.

"He had at that time," says Father Noel, "become intimately acquainted with the University of Louvain, and he had perceived offhand the immense possibilities of that institution. It was the only one in the world to unite two important characteristics: on the one hand, Catholic and free, it was, on the other, a great and a complete university, for centuries past the educational center of a nation, independent of the state yet possessing all the prerogatives of state institutions, and imparting, under conditions of absolute freedom, instruction in all branches of learning, whether literary, scientific, or

professional, to the intellectual élite of a country located in the very center of modern civilization. What an advantage to have religious problems studied in the light of researches in all scientific fields, conducted, first-hand, by members of the same institution! How beneficial, moreover, to scientific research itself the spirit of a broad and enlightened Catholicism animating an establishment of that size! The Belgian nuncio then and there conceived the potentialities of such an interpenetration of scientific life and Christian thinking; and, when the time came to realize his dream of a Thomistic revival, his thoughts quite naturally turned to Louvain."

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His plan of action once determined, Leo XIII resolved to make solemn announcement of his enterprise through the encyclical, *Æterni Patris*, which he published on August 4, in the year 1879.

However great the significance of that pontifical letter and the reaction to it throughout the world, it was really little more than a declaration of intentions. The first step toward actual achievement was not to be taken till a year later. In an epistle, dated December 25, 1880, the pontiff requested the Belgian bishops to create a chair of Thomist philosophy at the University of Louvain, that instruction in that subject might be offered to all students.

Consternation among the bishops, who were scarcely prepared for such a command! At first glance it was the difficulties they saw. How force even upon the best Belgian society, intelligent, to be sure, but none the less utilitarian, the idea of courses which would lead to no career, would deal with doctrines and methods long buried in the past, and be offered in a Latin unknown even to professors of the classics? With a budget already taxed to meet the annual expenses of the university, where find the money for a new professorship? Where, finally, was the man capable of assuming responsibility for a course over which the Pope would keep watch with closest interest?

The bishops hesitated. They tried to gain time by sending evasive replies to Rome. When Leo XIII again brought pressure to bear, they thought it their duty to begin casting about for a professor. They were inclined to choose Monsignor Van Weddingen, a metaphysician of repute, very well versed in the divers schools of modern thought. Van Weddingen, moreover, had published, just previously, a scholarly and illuminating commentary on the encyclical *Æterni Patris*, which had made known in Belgium the far-reaching significance of that document. When a rumor of Van Weddingen's nomination reached Abbé Mercier at the Petit-Séminaire in Malines, the young man exclaimed:

"Ah, if Van Weddingen is chosen, I shall surely register for the course!"

But Monsignor Van Weddingen was at that time chaplain at court, and, in view of the anticlerical tendencies of the liberal ministry then in power, Leopold II felt under no obligations to deprive himself of a priest attached to his palace to do a favor to a Catholic university. The nomination had to be withdrawn, and the bishops again took refuge in evasions and delays which at last began to tax the patience of Rome.

Two years had passed since the Pope first requested the creation of the chair and nothing had as yet been done. Regretfully, Leo XIII let it be known that he was about to send to Louvain at his own expense an Italian Dominican of recognized ability, and that, in order to give the man greater prestige, he would invest him with the rank and title of bishop. Forthwith the professor designated received orders to proceed to Belgium.

Confronted with a new-comer who was to be both a professor and a bishop, what would be the position of so many teachers who had grown old in their profession, or indeed of the rector himself, who did not enjoy such high rank in the Church? And what would Europe think of a Belgian university which had to go to Italy to find a competent

instructor? Some way out of the difficulty had to be found whatever the cost!

Again the bishops met, this time under the chairmanship of Cardinal Dechamps. The new bishop of Tournai, Monsignor du Rousseaux, had a candidate to offer, that the incumbent of the new chair might be a Belgian. In fact, he intended to propose a priest of whose learning and character he had personal knowledge of long standing: Abbé Mercier.

"Would he do?" asked the cardinal.

"I can tell Your Eminence this: that if Abbé Mercier belonged to my diocese, I should never give him up without a struggle!"

Such a recommendation was enough. To conform to the regular procedure, the rector of the university, Monsignor Pieraerts (Abbé Mercier's former Latin teacher) made the official nomination. It was unanimously accepted, on July 29, 1882.

The election was immediately reported to Rome. The Italian professor was at Trent, already on his way. A telegram canceled his appointment. On the twelfth of August Abbé Mercier was named honorary canon of Malines. But before beginning his university teaching, he had to have the express approval of the Pope. His own conscience, moreover, demanded that he spend some time in further preparation for his course.

CHAPTER IV

A CHAIR AND A CANONICATE

FOR the philosophical renaissance which he hoped to work out in Belgium, Leo XIII was offered a priest thirty-one years old, whose name had not yet crossed the frontiers of the diocese of Malines, and who had to his credit only four or five years of teaching in a lower seminary. The Pope could not think of giving this unknown man his confidence until he had first reassured himself in a personal interview. The "great abbé," as his students were already calling him, was summoned to Rome.

In anticipation of his audience with the Pope, Abbé Mercier thought it wise to have long conferences with the masters of Italian Thomism, Zigliara and Liberatore, Prisco, and Monsignor Talamo. He noticed at once that those scholars were inclined to a defensive rather than an offensive attitude. Indisputably masters of the doctrines of the "Summa," it had scarcely occurred to them to bring those principles abreast of modern scientific achievements; and they tended, it seemed to him, to heap

too comprehensive a scorn upon modern philosophical systems of which they had not always grasped the significance. It was apparent that a scholarship thus conceived would remain an affair of the theological seminaries, without exerting any appreciable influence on lay society at large. These masters, however, were thoroughly versed in scholastic doctrines and disposed, rather than not, to keep them free from modern alloys. Abbé Mercier made good use of his conversations with them in drawing up the prospectus which he was to submit to the Pope.

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The interview was a most exciting one. Here was a young priest hardly free as yet from work with mere school-boys. What impression would he make on a Pope who was planning a reform of modern thought, and indirectly of modern society, by reviving an ancient doctrine? Could any one think of undertaking so vast a project with so humble an instrument? Leo XIII's penetrating eyes rested for a time on the pale countenance of his visitor, and then he proceeded to subject him to a most searching examination. Buoyed up by the confidence the bishops of his country had reposed in him, strengthened by an entire absence of ambition and consequently of fear, Abbé Mercier answered questions modestly but without embarrassment. The Pope desired, as the young priest already knew through the

encyclical *Æterni Patris*, that the principles of Catholic philosophy be applied to the physical and natural sciences that these "might be made to produce all the results of which they were capable." He learned, furthermore, in the course of the conversation, how highly the Pope esteemed the efforts made by the medieval scholastics to bring the conquests of physical and natural science to bear upon the particular field of philosophy.

The Abbé on his side had long been pondering on the state of mind of the medical students over whose debates he had formerly presided at the College of Pope Hadrian VI. He had been struck by their invincible tendency to mix physiological questions with every theory of psychology brought before them. In their eyes metaphysics had to take account of facts and be made to accord with experimental science. It was evident that, in all branches of human knowledge, the same demands would be made of philosophy. Abbé Mercier had held these convictions for a long time and he ventured to express them to His Holiness. Their minds were on common ground—the mind of a great Pope, destined to throw so much light on difficult problems of his age, and the mind of this young, unknown, and untried professor. The Sovereign Pontiff gave his confidence to the envoy of the Belgian bishops. He examined the outline of the proposed course

and returned it with a few minor suggestions, but very explicitly approving it as a whole. The chair of "higher philosophy according to Saint Thomas" was definitely established at the University of Louvain and Abbé Mercier was to be its first incumbent. Leo XIII had been impressed, not only with the penetrating intelligence of the candidate and the sureness of his scholarship, but even more with his demeanor of thoughtful modesty and the uprightness of character revealed by his large, clear eyes that seemed to illumine his face with infinite gentleness. After the young man's departure, the Pope remarked, with a note of affection in his voice:

"I like that boy Mercier. He is a man of great intelligence, of great piety, of great will-power. What an attractive personality!"

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That he had will-power there was now ample occasion for young Mercier to prove. As for mastering medieval doctrine and comparing it with the principal systems of modern thought, he could depend on his books; but if, as the Pope desired, he were to attempt a synthesis of the experimental sciences and Thomist philosophy, he would have to be adequately informed in each of the many branches of the former. Abbé Mercier had no such competence, at least to his own way of thinking. Accordingly he resolved, before beginning his own

lectures, to become a student once more; and, first of all, in order to acquire the knowledge of psychology that he desired, to have first-hand knowledge of those physiological experiments which were then regarded as most interesting or most conclusive.

At the moment Charcot's observations and theories on nervous cases treated in the hospital of La Salpêtrière in Paris were everywhere exciting the world of science. How could Mercier investigate the experiments of the famous physician? How, especially, could he profit by them? Having the will, it was easy to find the way. The young teacher let his beard grow, donned civilian clothes, and set out for Paris. A few days later there could be seen at Charcot's lectures a young man of distinguished bearing but of severely plain attire (plain, in spite of a pin with a double eagle that he was using for his cravat). He went by the name of Doctor Mercier. He was in reality the canon of Louvain.

When he had derived from the course all the information he deemed essential for his particular purposes, Abbé Mercier hurried back to Belgium. There he shed his beard, reassumed the cassock he was never to lay aside again, and made ready to face the astonishment and, if need be, the criticisms which would doubtless greet the opening of his course.

These were moments of heartrending separations and of poignant anxieties for Abbé Mercier. Just as success was smiling upon him in the Lower Seminary at Malines, just as he was beginning to find a delightful and a powerful support in the admiration and affection of his pupils, he was being called upon to break old ties, abandon cheerful prospects of a safe and secure future, for other work where success would come slowly, if at all, with excellent chances of a resounding fiasco. As he faced the situation, shivers of cold terror would sweep over him.

And he had reason to fear. Aside from the support of the Pope, powerful, indeed, but distant, he could count with certainty on little sympathy. Conditions, on the contrary, were all against him. In the great centers of philosophy, especially in the state universities, modernness was the watchword of the day. Almost all thinkers had been infected with the virus of Kantianism, or at least fascinated with the subtle imaginings of German thought. They had not ceased lavishing their contempt upon the pretended "darkness" of the Middle Ages. They would not accept without protest a return to the thought of those distant days.

At Louvain itself, in the very bosom of the Catholic university, Abbé Mercier's innovation

would undoubtedly create a delicate and embarrassing situation. Since the misadventures of Abbé Ubaghs, all the professors of philosophy and theology, with the possible exception of Bossu, an avowed Cartesian, called themselves Thomists; and Thomists they doubtless were, though inadequately, inconsistently, without much conviction. But why, then, a new professorship in Thomism? What lay underneath this appointment of a young man to a new chair apparently set up in opposition to older and much respected ones?

More dangerous than hostility on the part of the university staff would be a general indifference to this new teaching. To stand up before the scientific world and lift the shroud of oblivion which for centuries had covered the weighty tomes of the scholastic doctors would at that time have been a hazardous enterprise in any country, but nowhere more so than in Belgium. Whatever the reasons may have been, whether an innate tendency of the Belgian to prefer the positive and the definite to the speculative, or whether insufficient stress previously laid on philosophical studies in university curricula, the fact was that at that time almost all university courses aimed at preparation for a vocation or a profession. There was little interest in pure scholarship, in research devoid of practical reference. What would be the fate of a doctrine easily representable

as a return to abstractions condemned by the progress of modern times?

To these difficulties, in themselves already grave enough, still another would be added: the optional character of the new courses. The Belgian student was already overburdened with the requirements of his regular examinations. At his elbow stood parents for the most part interested only in such studies as promised immediately useful returns to their child. Would there be any patronage for extra courses not clearly and explicitly connected with any career?

The Belgian prelates, at least, might have been actively interesting their influential parishioners in this new direction. But those were the days of the Frère-Orban ministry. Catholics everywhere, laymen and clergy alike, were absorbed in projects for "free" schools to neutralize the antireligious tendencies of the state schools. This was not just the moment to raise money and expend energy in behalf of a new professorship at the University of Louvain!

The problem, if Mercier were not to fail, was threefold: "to arouse the interest of students in pure research, the interest of the Belgian public in philosophy, the interest of scholars and scientists in St. Thomas"; and all this, while disarming local suspicions, and adjusting local complications, at Louvain. The most courageous soul might well have

quailed before such a task; but it was a task well calculated to prove the quality of a great intelligence fortified with a stout heart. Confident of divine support, which he incessantly besought in his prayers, and strong in the feeling that he was in the right since he was obeying an explicit command of the Pope, Canon Mercier set bravely to work.

His inaugural lecture, of an introductory nature, dwelt on the many advantages to be derived from Thomism in providing a sound orientation for modern thought. His real test, however, was to come in the first lecture in the course itself, where he would meet a skeptical audience composed of widely varying elements. Attracted largely by curiosity, students attended it in considerable numbers, coming from all faculties of the university, representing technical training of many different kinds, but encumbered, on the whole, with a very light philosophical baggage. They looked forward with great glee to this offering of apocalyptic phrases which the new professor would doubtless put forward to guide them through the dreary metaphysic of mummified pedagogues of the Middle Ages.

But, at the very opening of the course, what a surprise! They were astonished to hear the language of their respective specialties—"comparative grammar," "cellular biology," "physiology of the nerv-

ous system"! Could that be the medieval doctrine they had thought of as bristling with antiquated extravagances? That, and no other; for just as soon as the discoveries accumulated by the various sciences were grouped and harmonized in general concepts, the scholastic formulas of St. Thomas began to emerge; and it turned out that the baroque Latin of the Angelic Doctor when paraphrased by the professor had no other meaning than that which the nature of the subject would have led one to anticipate. Something very modern, then, this Thomism, something alive, contemporary, interesting! And all of them, jurists, philologists, physicians alike, were caught with the same zeal to learn more about scholasticism and to discuss its problems. The new professor's success was as complete as it was unexpected.

Canon Mercier, to be sure, had been paying a high price for this triumph, and every day thereafter he continued to impose a prodigious amount of work upon himself in order to maintain the same high level of instruction. We saw him, some months back, working under Charcot in Paris; but there he had been able to familiarize himself with only one specialty. To acquire in other subjects the knowledge indispensable to his purpose of modernizing Thomism and winning it a hearing, he did not hesitate to come down from his professorial cathedra, mingle

as a student with other students in the lecture halls, make himself the assiduous disciple of such teachers as he esteemed most highly. He regularly frequented the laboratory of the neurologist, Van Genuchten, and followed the lectures of the chemist, Paul Henry, as well as those of the mathematician, Paul Mansion.

In this way the methods of empirical scientists became familiar to him. He gained experience in evaluating the facts on which they based their theories; while his own philosophical training enabled him to pass judgment on the accuracy of their inductions and sometimes to halt or rectify them. He was soon accepted by these men as a co-worker in their particular fields of experimental science. In his own realm of metaphysical speculation, Canon Mercier, as was natural, towered above them all.

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More intimately personal qualities doubtless explain the ascendancy which he enjoyed from the very first and continued to hold for a quarter of a century at Louvain. Nothing ever troubled the serenity of that priestly soul which was ever unruffled, which was always so pliant before the various situations of daily life as to meet them all with tranquillity. An inner sternness of temperament never went without a friendly smile which expressed inward peace, a fundamental good-will to all men. Canon Mer-

cier's firmness was tempered with unfailing tact. Even when he had made a decision, he resorted for its execution less to the use of his authority than to the arts of the psychologist and the diplomat. No one excelled him in those sagacities of the heart, those attentions, big and little, which are the stuff of friendship. In that aristocracy of amiableness which arises in every society of souls, Canon Mercier was born prince and sovereign.

One of Canon Mercier's former students, M. Passelecq, thus summarizes the impressions he gathered of his master during his years of study at Louvain:

"The charm of intercourse with Mercier is a matter of every moment, of every occasion. The secret of it is hard to analyze: it is a blend, perhaps, of kindness, gentleness, forgetfulness of self, of candor, considerateness, uprightness. His manner is so accurately adapted to one's susceptibilities, it is enveloped in such perfect graciousness, suffused with such obvious understanding, that you are captivated before you are really aware of it: but once made prisoner thus by surprise you never ask your freedom back again!

"Whenever Canon Mercier had an opportunity to encourage a student's first timid advance toward truth, he seized upon it with affectionate joy. His procedure at oral examinations was characteristic,

His broad forehead slightly wrinkled, his eyes fixed in the image of kindliness upon the candidate's, he seemed to be trying to reach the bottom of the young man's heart, to help in the birth of an idea there and to guide its first emergence into being. He would listen attentively, as though stalking the slightest particle of truth. If he had the happiness (for him it was happiness) to discern some trace of it, he would leap upon it, unwrap it from its swaddles, complete it, define it, leaving the student in the end with the impression that he had still a great deal to learn but that he was no longer altogether ignorant. And having passed the first stage with the professor's help, the student felt that he would be able to traverse the remaining ones by himself.

"Canon Mercier's magnetism as a teacher was only the expression of his unremitting interest in men, the visible sign of a deep-grounded habit of giving the best that was in him to every one. He once observed, in comment on his popularity with students: 'There is one compliment which my conscience allows me to accept and which none of my former students, I believe, has ever withheld from me; namely that, in spite of my many defects and perversities, I have always, ardently and without distinction of persons, been fond of young men. Is it surprising then that one of my great ambitions is to be loved by them in return?' "

That ambition he cherished in that early period of his life, and it was gratified with ever greater and sweeter fullness as more and more the splendor of his heart shed its attractive light upon his competence as a scholar.

Assuming, at the beginning of his work, that he would be a voice crying in the wilderness, the authorities had considerably thought of providing him with a factitious audience at least, by ordering a certain number of the students in theology to attend his courses. He captivated these men so completely that they continued at his lectures with eager assiduity even after lay students began flocking to him in crowds. And most of them, sensing the holy priest under the garb of the popular professor, begged him to become their spiritual director.

Other friendships of greater weight began to cheer him along his pathway in life, with promise—since lasting friendship must rest in part upon admiration—of enduring to the very end. Lured by the charm of his personality as well as by the intrinsic interest of his courses, one of his colleagues, Léon de Monge, regularly took a place among his students; and the problems raised in the lectures gave rise afterwards to friendly conversations between the two men, mutual affection gradually ripening as their minds came closer together.

Sometimes, after hours of toil in his study, Canon Mercier felt the need of physical exercise, and he would sally forth of an afternoon with Van Genuchten, along one of the many silent roads in the neighborhood of the little city. From afar they would look back upon the venerable gables of the university, bathed in the twilight haze, buildings which for centuries had been sheltering so many disquisitions of the learned, so many fruitful discussions of the ideas and problems which eternally beset and eternally inspire mankind. And they would encourage each other to carry on courageously the work left unfinished by the men of old, to pick up the torch that had fallen from their hands and advance it a little farther. Scholarly conversations, these with Van Genuchten, but conducted in the unconstrained spirit of friendly chats, with all the expansiveness prompted by the intimacy of the hour and by the hopes they shared in common.

Another friendship was, if not more precious, at least most immediately useful to Canon Mercier. Rector Pieraerts, his former teacher at Saint-Rombaut, had officially nominated him before the synod of the bishops to the new chair of philosophy at Louvain. The dean never withdrew his support. He upheld Canon Mercier and guided him along the thorny path he had to tread at the start. If the young professor in part succeeded in overcoming

the diffidence felt by certain of his colleagues, it was due to the benevolent and decisive mediation of Dean Pieraerts.

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This atmosphere of cordial sympathy gave Canon Mercier courage in his work and, as occasion demanded, in his combats. He went on with his review of medieval philosophy, and, before audiences as delighted as amazed, evolved his demonstration that the metaphysical system of St. Thomas furnished the most satisfactory higher synthesis of all the branches of knowledge taught at the university.

By dint of terrific application, he covered, in his courses between the years 1882 and 1886, the whole field of the history of philosophy. To bring greater intensity and variety into his teaching, the series of formal lectures was broken once a week by a period devoted to discussions.

The professor was now sure enough of himself to try to widen his influence and to act upon public opinion. He had already drawn up and prepared for printing a treatise on "Cosmology." Three long articles written for the "Revue Catholique" on "Mechanistic Determinism and Free Will" had immediately attracted the attention of philosophers everywhere. Finally, he had organized a flourishing study-club, wherein a larger and larger group of eager and enthusiastic young men began discussing

possible applications of Thomist doctrine not only to the empirical sciences, but also to social institutions.

The day had long since passed when the authorities, as a favor and for the sake of appearances, had been sending to Professor Mercier's course a few theological students more or less reluctant to take their plunge into the subtleties of scholasticism. These first students had remained, to be sure. They found their knowledge of Thomism helpful in the study of theology, and they appreciated the devotion which Canon Mercier lavished upon them. Now, however, the growing influence of his lectures was attested by the number of lay students he was attracting—and this was in line with the Pope's desires; for Leo XIII had been thinking primarily of young men outside the Church in urging the establishment of the chair at Louvain.

After the first few months, it became apparent to all of Canon Mercier's followers that it was not just a matter of memorizing the doctrines of a thirteenth-century master. Thomist principles must be viewed, not as points of arrival, but as points of departure; not as limitations, but as inspirations. The great trouble with contemporary society, as Canon Mercier's young men were beginning to perceive, was the anarchy prevailing in ideas. To rid society of its deadly poisons, one must feed it sane

and sound concepts of life, restoring moral unity to the world on the basis of an indisputable philosophy. The Pope had suggested that such a body of sound doctrines could be found in an ancient wisdom coming down to them across the ages. Should they rally to it? Canon Mercier had convinced them that Thomism was clearly superior to the incoherent or fantastic theories which had corrupted the modern mind. Furthermore, they were beginning to appreciate its unlimited scope and to understand that without it no science could be complete, no institution secure. But if this Christian philosophy, proposed by Leo XIII as a means of reforming the modern world, were to attain its end, it would have to penetrate everything everywhere: it would have to reach out into the social sciences and mold social practices, so as to insure prosperity in the family and peace among the nations; it would have to invade the natural sciences, that their discoveries might be crowned with universal synthesis; it should embrace the fine arts themselves, that the noble purpose these have in life might not be lost from view, that they be prevented from going astray in materialistic or sensualistic deviations from the true course.

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Instaurare omnia in Christo—to renew all things in a knowledge flowing from Christ! Such was to be

the motto of Pope Pius X. It was already the practice of his predecessor.

But to rear such a gigantic edifice, even on the limited plot of ground constituted by Belgium, could a single artisan henceforth suffice? Cosmology, a subject on which Professor Mercier had just made searching studies, could not be approached without assistance from physics and mathematics. Psychology, to which he was now turning, depended just as intimately on biology and other natural sciences. Canon Mercier was to make a name for himself by a number of original suggestions in the field of criteriology (methodology); but such speculation presupposed the data of history. If one were to study ethics, its corollaries would have to be sought in sociology, political economy, the sciences of government. In a word, all these subjects, so different in purposes, so varying in their methods of investigation, demanded specialists. Conversely, in proportion as specialists in the different fields amassed their facts, they needed a common guiding light to prompt them to intuitions of new facts. From whatever angle one looked at the matter, some sort of association seemed indispensable.

Canon Mercier solicited the aid of some of his colleagues that his work might profit by the authority accorded them in their respective fields. But, whether from a feeling that their philosophical preparation

was insufficient, or because they had not changed their attitude of hostility toward the new course imposed upon the traditional curriculum of the university, the men to whom he appealed declined to coöperate. Canon Mercier was obliged to fall back upon a few of his best students. For some time he had had his eyes on four in particular, men who had distinguished themselves by unusual enthusiasm for difficult researches, by their remarkable powers of assimilation, by the funds of scientific knowledge they had already acquired, in short, by the promise they showed of some day becoming real masters. Desiré Nys was specially interested in the problems of cosmology, Simon Deploige, in the social sciences. Maurice de Wulf was working with great energy among the scholastic authors who had written commentaries on the work of St. Thomas or continuations of it. Armand Thiéry, physician, psychologist, and mathematician all in one, was already far enough advanced to teach successfully in any of those three branches of knowledge.

Canon Mercier entrusted the teaching of the sciences to these young men, reserving for himself the more strictly philosophical courses.

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Leo XIII was closely watching the progress of the work undertaken at his behest. He sensed the difficulties it was beginning to meet; nor did Canon

Mercier's manner of dealing with them, his silent courage, his humility and generosity, escape the Pontiff's approving eye. He decided to encourage the Canon's meritorious efforts by a striking expression of papal esteem. In 1886, accordingly, acting *motu proprio*, he named the young priest a chamberlain in the pontifical household. Professor Mercier was just thirty-five years of age. The young canon's first reaction to this honor was more of embarrassment than of delight. In September of that year he wrote to one of his old schoolmates, the Abbé Lesquoy:

"I thank you for your graceful congratulations. If you only knew how ridiculous I seem to myself! I haven't yet dared to appear in public in the purple of a monsignor."

And he added, with a touch of irreverence:

"For that I think I'll wait till Mardi gras!"

If, however, the Pope's action added luster to the chair of "philosophy according to St. Thomas" at Louvain, it did not make Monsignor Mercier's situation among his colleagues any easier. At this moment, too, a sad personal loss threatened to jeopardize his position. Rector Pieraerts, to whom Mercier owed, in part, the initial success of his professorship, died in 1887. The blow fell at a most critical juncture. Monsignor Mercier was on the point of launching his project for a Higher Institute of Philoso-

phy, conceived as a sort of annex to the university. The idea was certain to be most unpopular in Belgium. No matter! When the Pope was consulted, he applauded the idea enthusiastically; and in spite of obstacles in prospect, regardless of the bitterness he might arouse and the disappointments he would be sure to encounter, Monsignor Mercier resolved, as he was fond of saying himself, "to head forwards."

CHAPTER V

COMBAT

TO organize the various professorships grouped around Monsignor Mercier's chair of philosophy into a permanent institute, required another official act on the part of Leo XIII; and the Pope, accordingly, made his intentions known to the Belgian bishops in the month of May, 1888. The bishops offered no opposition to the new foundation and readily elected Monsignor Mercier as president of the future institute. But their interest, for the moment, stopped at that point. While following Mercier's projects with a benevolent curiosity, they foresaw that the execution of them would prove financially burdensome, and they thought it better to husband their resources for more immediately urgent needs.

In November, 1889, the Pope returned to the charge, and partially at least to overcome the major obstacle, he donated a sum of 150,000 francs "that a beginning might be made." Monsignor Mercier, on his side, appealed to his former pupils, soliciting the generous aid of all Catholics who grasped the

necessity of advanced studies for an adequate defense of the Church. Work was started on buildings to house the new institution following plans drawn by a future minister, M. Helleputte, a personal friend of the president. Lecture halls and laboratories were provided for in a fine Gothic edifice, which also contained a little chapel (a marvel of good taste), to serve as setting for religious ceremonies.

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The enterprise at the time had the good wishes and even the coöperation of the new rector, Monsignor Abbeloos; and, while awaiting a formal canonical charter for the dream he cherished, Monsignor Mercier was free to continue his scientific labors. It was just then that he began the publication of his courses, a "Logic," an "Introduction to Metaphysics," a "Psychology," a "Criteriology," following one another in rapid succession in as many years, and receiving the applause not only of philosophers who wrote in French, but of specialists the world over (the volumes had been made available in many languages through translations executed by former pupils of the prelate).

But it was not enough to find money for the Institute and leisure for his own work. Monsignor Mercier had to bring home to the influential men of his country the importance of pure science in

meeting on their own ground scientists hostile to religion. The periodical conference of Belgian Catholics opened at Malines in the month of September, 1891. Monsignor Mercier thought it wise to read to that select audience a memorial on "Advanced Studies in Philosophy," and on the practical efficacy of such studies for maintaining social equilibrium, as well as for the defense of the Faith. The members of the assembly were more particularly men of action than men of learning; all the more reason, therefore, for emphasizing to them the influence of learning upon action, and the rôle which ideas and ideals, though we do not always suspect it, play in the leadership of mankind.

"Catholics," declared the prelate, "are now living in isolation within the scientific world. They are looked upon with suspicion, treated with indifference. Their publications are hardly read outside Catholic circles, and when they are read, they exert no influence, they provoke no comment. We publish important magazines in all countries. Who quotes them? Do the Protestant or non-sectarian periodicals of Italy, France, Belgium, England, Germany, or America, ever pay any attention to what Catholics say? Publicly and ex officio the clergy constitutes the governing class of the Catholic Church. But is it not a fact that everywhere, excepting with a very few of its closer associates, our clergy is re-

garded as a body of pious, zealous, and high-minded men, but indifferent, not to say hostile, to science? This state of intellectual isolation on our part is a menace both to religion and to science."

The orator then went on to suggest remedies:

"We must educate, in numbers ever greater, men who are devoted to science for its own sake, without vocational aims, without the direct concern of defending religion, men who will work at first hand to assemble materials for the edifice of science and who will contribute to the progressive erection of that edifice. The task of creating the resources which such work requires is the goal to be held in view to-day by all who are concerned for the prestige of the Church and its efficacious action upon the souls of men. . . ."

In support of his thesis the promoter of the institute quoted the authoritative words of the Pope:

"It is necessary, as the great Leo XIII says, 'that we should have investigators and teachers working in all the various domains of knowledge, men who by *their* activity, by *their* accomplishments, will win the right to speak to the scientific world and compel attention. Then, when we meet the eternal objection that blind faith, that faith in any form, is incompatible with science, we shall make answer, not with abstract arguments, not with volumes of erudition, not with appeals to the past: we shall make answer with

the evidence of living facts, visible to the eye in the present.' "

But to obtain such results, "association must make up for the insufficiency of the isolated worker. Men of analysis and men of synthesis must get together to create, by virtue of their daily contact and their joint action, an atmosphere favorable to the harmonious development of science and philosophy." Hence the undebatable usefulness of the new institute.

This was a straightforward presentation of the problem of advanced philosophical education to the leading Catholics of Belgium. Monsignor Mercier hoped to sow in their minds ideas that would aid the future of Christianity in Belgium and throughout the world. He hoped, also, to gain pupils and resources for his own work. As for the financial aspects of the matter, no argument could be so strong as the picture of an organization already functioning and asking merely for the means to grow in stability and efficiency. Monsignor Mercier was glad to explain the arrangement of courses in the new school:

"The complete course of studies in the Institute offers facilities for three, and, in the cases of students with special aptitudes, for four, years of work. The prerequisite for admission is the completion of preliminary studies for degrees in the

sciences, or in philosophy, or in theology. At the beginning of the second year the student, while still attending general courses, chooses a specialty in which he can give free rein to personal aptitudes or preferences; he enrolls in one of the sections, of which there are three: one for the physical and mathematical sciences, a second for the biological sciences, a third for the social and political sciences. This combination seems to avoid the double danger of old-fashioned encyclopedism on the one hand, and excessive speculation on the other."

Notwithstanding the lofty tone of this memorial which might have seemed over the heads of some people, it was understood and highly approved. Pupils came in greater numbers, and the money necessary to complete buildings and to provide equipment, in some cases very costly, was not lacking.

A final charter had not yet been obtained from the Pope—among other perplexing problems, it was necessary to determine the official relations of the new institute with the older university. The former was to remain a branch of the latter, and at the same time to live, in large measure, a life of its own. The adjustment was a delicate one, requiring careful thought and involving many delays. The drafting of the statutes of the new foundation took more than three years. Fortunately the long

wait did not interfere at all with busy activity about the growing hive. It was during this period, perhaps, that Monsignor Mercier, now in possession of his full powers and still free from the cruel cares that were soon to beset him, did his finest work as a teacher of young men.

Other details recorded by M. Passelecq, his former pupil, show the impression he made at that time upon his students :

“Monsignor Mercier is a very tall man, and the effect of height is accentuated by his extraordinary leanness. He has a small, bony head, the cheeks sunken, as though to give greater relief to his expression of kindliness. His lips are always parted in a smile. A smile, too, in his eyes at all times! Perhaps the most conspicuous feature of this human frame so tall, and so frail, the crown and key as it were to the architecture of the whole edifice, is a fine, broad, open forehead, the ideal brow one would conceive to house a strong and industrious brain. When you see Monsignor Mercier for the first time, it is that vast, prominent, luminous forehead which first strikes your eye; but, if the interview be prolonged ever so little, it is his smile and the expression of his eyes that you carry away, his eyes especially, exceedingly bright, attentive, benevolent eyes. They rest upon you at once, and glow

upon you like the soft, steady light of a study-lamp.

"The students of the university, who liked to point their shafts of wit with a barb of irreverence, invented a slightly acid nickname to sum up the effect their teacher of philosophy made upon them; they referred to him among themselves as the 'Grand Sympathique' ('very likable,' also 'spinal nerve') and the pun (rather flat as puns will be) hit the nail on the head.

"In his lectures Monsignor Mercier excelled in precision and up-to-dateness. There was nothing trite, nothing stereotyped about his eminent mind. Even the axioms of medieval wisdom he rethought and relived before restating them; he presented them only when they had been translated into modern terms, or expanded into modern analogies. Faithful to the spirit of Aristotle, St. Thomas, and the scholastics of the golden age, he was careful to put his students on guard against ever allowing respect for tradition and authority to lead to intellectual servitude. He himself, in his general conception of philosophy, manifested an acute awareness of the need for progress.

"He was at his best, as his writings show, in bringing out the significant, the contemporary, aspects of all permanent philosophical truths; in approaching them by their particular connections or

coincidences with ideas and problems of the present time. Incessantly permeating the ancient principle with his personal thought, he made philosophy a living force, and, in a certain sense, an emotional experience.

"The lectures of the professor had an extraordinary hold upon the minds of his auditors. Very few of his students, moreover, failed of opportunity to put his intellectual generosity to personal test, to have personal experience of his infinite patience and readiness to help, whether in chance meetings, or in those intimate conversations in his study in which Monsignor Mercier loved to individualize his lessons and fertilize the seeds they had left in a student's mind by friendly counsel or suggestion. Very few professors at our alma mater took greater part than he in the group life of the students. And since, meantime, Monsignor Mercier was as much esteemed by most of his colleagues as he was loved by his students, it is not at all difficult to understand the very special enthusiasm of which he was the object at that time."

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In founding the Institute of Philosophy at Louvain, the Pope had had particularly in view a soundly Christian training for young laymen who would eventually occupy influential positions in Belgium and other countries. As a matter of fact, lay

students were now in the majority in the various courses of the institute, while young clerics were becoming correspondingly rare. Monsignor Mercier, for his part, had zealously devoted the first years of his manhood to the education of priests at the Petit-Séminaire of Malines, and he was now not easily consolable at being no longer actively engaged in preparation for the clergy. Leo XIII had no objection to this attitude. Fully conscious of the advantages offered by scholasticism as a preparation for theology, he was anxious to procure for Monsignor Mercier a greater number of ecclesiastical students; and he stood on watch for an opportunity to do so.

But how recruit seminarists or young priests for the institute? If a certain number of clerics might well be encouraged to go on to a doctorate in theology at the university, the studies required for that degree were already onerous enough without any one's thinking of adding to them an extra period of three or four years in the Institute of Philosophy. Confronted by this difficulty, Monsignor Mercier thought of requesting the bishops to send to Louvain the most gifted students following courses in philosophy in the lower seminaries. He would undertake to complete their training in a special institute which he would supervise personally. Meantime he would be giving them an introduction to ad-

vanced philosophy which would enable them afterwards to follow courses in theology to better advantage either in the higher seminaries or at the university. It was objected that the plan would tend to diminish the control exercised by the bishops over members of their dioceses and would skim the cream from the classes in philosophy in lower seminaries. The Pope, however, had seized upon the idea joyfully. As he had formerly done for the chair of Thomist philosophy, he now assumed responsibility for this new institute.

So, on July 27, in the year 1892, while Monsignor Mercier was in attendance at the annual meeting of the bishops held in Malines to consider affairs of the University of Louvain, the papal nuncio, Monsignor Nava di Bontife, delivered a pontifical letter that was addressed to him personally. In the document Leo XIII congratulated the prelate on his plan and urged him to put it into execution forthwith.

But, having taken cognizance of the letter, the bishops were once more faced with the material difficulties of the enterprise; and since, moreover, the letter was not addressed directly to them, they were not called upon to take action. Monsignor Mercier returned to Louvain in high honor from the Pope's new expressions of interest in him, but no better off as to means for bringing his dreams

to pass. He had to bide his time for the moment.

Meanwhile, the work in progress at the Institute of Philosophy was meeting with more and more favor in learned circles. Buildings for the different departments were now ready. The time had come for the official chartering of the new institution, which the Pope proclaimed in a pontifical letter dated March 7, 1894, and published at the time the new buildings were dedicated. This brief granted important privileges to the institute, in particular that of conferring canonical degrees on students in philosophy—a startling recognition of Monsignor Mercier's arduous, unwearied and, for the most part, lonely exertions in support of the Pope's intellectual policies.

Mercier himself seemed to have reached the apex of his apostolate and of his influence. To prepare for future struggles priests as eminent in learning as in character; to throw the light of Christian truth upon all forms of social activity; to provide at last a solid foundation for institutions which had been growing up in all countries on false principles, and had been threatening to collapse ever since the French Revolution—what a wonderful task! And to a priest, a plain priest barely past his fortieth year, the Pope had entrusted, in the domain of ideas, the accomplishment of his projects for the reformation and the progress of society!

Such missions are usually performed only at the cost of bitter sufferings, which must be accepted as the price to be paid for success. Successful Monsignor Mercier had been almost invariably, and despite unavoidable difficulties, in everything he had so far undertaken. His incessant toil and his devotion to the spiritual welfare of others had been rewarded by universal esteem and affection. The joys of greater and greater progress in knowledge, an accumulation of honors, unlimited confidence from the head of the Church—these had come one after the other to compensate him for his untiring labors and his utter forgetfulness of self. But he had not as yet “borne witness with blood”—he had still to follow along the Via Dolorosa the footsteps of Him who offered His life as a sacrifice to Truth!

The Pope’s concession of various privileges to the Institute of Philosophy soon led to strained relations between the rector of the university and the president of the institute. The power of conferring degrees, in particular, seemed to make Monsignor Mercier’s creation, though in theory it was still attached to the greater university body, an independent organism, a sort of state within a state. And the enormous sums spent on the new foundation—were they not monies taken from the older institution, left just that much the poorer?

Believing himself (without doubt sincerely) to

be acting in the best interests of his own charge, Monsignor Abbeloos, who had maintained friendly relations with his colleague hitherto, now began to show signs of ill-humor. Certain professors found that Monsignor Mercier's courses were drawing students away from their own; and they seized the opportunity to vent their own spleen, even going so far as to express rather sharp criticism of these neo-Thomist doctrines which were being forced upon the admiration of the world.

In the first place, did this new movement really correspond to the spirit of the encyclical *Æterni Patris*? The Pope had, it is true, asked that Catholic principles be so used that the physical and natural sciences "might be made to produce all the results of which they were capable." But had he meant that, under cover of a Christian philosophy, the empirical sciences should be forced upon Catholics at so considerable a cost? Philosophy, no doubt, meant a deeper understanding of the knowledge derived from observation; but common or ordinary observation was meant—the old scholastics knew no other kind. Why, then, all this scientific erudition, which could be cultivated only at a sacrifice of a truly philosophical training? Why, moreover, this disrespect for Latin, the traditional language of the Church and of science, in favor of French, a tongue unknown to a part of the Belgian people, in

fact, an object of deep-seated antipathies in certain sections of the country?

Echoes of these complaints frequently made their way into the episcopal residences. The bishops had not viewed the revival of Thomist thought with any great enthusiasm. They were quite ready to listen to recriminations. They had as yet no personal feeling in the matter, but they were not loath to admit that where there was so much smoke there must be some fire.

The phrasing of certain articles in the charter of the Institute of Philosophy now began to give rise to unfortunate misunderstandings. The main lines of the project had been arranged with Leo XIII verbally. The offices of the Congregation of Studies, at Rome, influenced perhaps by interests hostile to Monsignor Mercier, substantially modified meanings and tendencies, not without jeopardizing the success of Thomist instruction and endangering the peace that it was so desirable to reëstablish at Louvain. Mercier endeavored to have the offending articles amended. But his adversaries then accused him of trying to betray the Pope's thought. His conduct and his policies were reported to the Pope in so disfigured and distorted a form that Leo XIII allowed it to transpire, by unmistakable signs, that his confidence in Monsignor Mercier was shaken. Writing in the Pope's name, Cardinal Mazella ad-

dressed a sharply worded letter to the president of the Institute of Philosophy. The latter should henceforth be subordinate to the rector of the university! Instruction in his establishment should be given in Latin! In the event of non-compliance with these orders, provisions would be taken for changes in personnel! The letter containing these reprimands was itself to be distributed, at the end of the academic year, to all the professors of the university!

Monsignor Mercier set out at once for Rome in order to present his side of the case. But enemies preceded him there, followed him from place to place, preoccupied all the approaches to the seats of power; and they did not rest till they had persuaded His Holiness to withdraw the privilege of granting degrees from the institute which he himself had just founded.

After the brilliant favor he had enjoyed, this meant evident disavowal and censure for Monsignor Mercier. For the work he had so laboriously built up, it signified collapse. So at least every one supposed. Indeed, with a view to his expected resignation, a curacy in the city of Brussels was indirectly suggested to him in the year 1896.

But this was to underestimate Monsignor Mercier's indomitable energy. Alone, saddened, by no means beaten, he returned to Louvain to take up his work again. He was received there with the coolness

usually extended to fallen favorites. A report had spread abroad that, the Pope having now withdrawn his support from the Institute of Philosophy, the school had absolutely no future. This was enough to scatter the students to the four winds. When Mercier and his professors now went to their lecture hours, they found themselves speaking in virtually empty halls.

A few students nevertheless remained, "trusting in Providence for a return of justice." The four professors trained by Monsignor Mercier, Nys, De Wulf, Deploige, and Thiéry, also decided to stand by their master to the end. This little group went quietly about the usual tasks as though no squall had ever troubled the peaceful horizon.

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Lavishing more care than ever on the lectures he delivered to the few pupils left in his courses, Monsignor Mercier also began to prepare new editions of his books and to come closer to former students of Louvain who were preparing translations of them in various countries. The "Revue Néo-scholastique," recently founded as a clearing-house for the Thomists scattered about the Old World and the New, saw its influence widening, thanks to more active and more intelligent advertisement. From thinkers everywhere, even from philosophers who did not hold Catholic beliefs, came more and more

numerous evidences of an esteem so real and so impressive as to show that the neo-Thomist movement was continually gaining in depth and in efficacy. The man whom every one had considered crushed was calmer, more resolute, more up-and-doing than ever. In the campus jargon of Louvain the "Grand Sympathique" had now become "His Sereneness."

For two years Monsignor Mercier was to know all the bitterness of toiling without encouragement, without the support of superiors, with nothing to keep him steadfast except the vision of a great work to be saved. At no moment in his life does he offer a more inspiring sight—never are we better able to see those eminent personal qualities which help us to understand the secret of his world-wide influence. One of his disciples of that period, M. Van Cauwelaert, has portrayed him as he appeared during those years of silence and humiliation, in terms which reveal the intimate virtues of the man and the priest and explain the teacher of those days as they explain, later on, the bishop.

"I believe," says this former student, "that Monsignor Mercier's great power lay in the lofty conscience that ruled his acts and which may be defined in two words: self-knowledge and self-control. Will, love, intelligence—these three: a will that was master absolute of his physical organism, but was itself impelled by a love that soared toward the summits,

each beat of its pinions guided by a rational view of things. This was Mercier in a nutshell. His life might well be described as a paragraph of Thomist ethics in action.

"The freedom of his spirit was stamped on his features as on a printed page. He was one of those men whose character could be read from his physical make-up. An oval face, the brow marked by energetic lines; the profile finely drawn, with a certain ascetic cast; soft, peaceful, but penetrating eyes; the hair thin rather than not; hands long and delicate that opened in quiet gesture to stress his words; a tall figure that stooped a little rather from fatigue than from years: it suggested force, on the whole—a commanding figure, but so radiant with amenity at the same time, that we, young students newly arrived in Louvain, would turn to him instinctively for help in all sorts of troubles, never pausing to consider that we were thus robbing a precious life of inestimably precious moments. Such the physical aspect of the man.

"Mercier was a model of kindness. To forget himself, to wear himself out in an incessant effort to spread joy about him, were always prime needs of his spirit. I remember touching examples of his generosity with money. He gave as though he were rich; he gave till nothing was left to him but poverty. But he was just as reckless, just as generous,

just as much a spendthrift, with his time. So long as he thought he was helping others, he called no moment his own. He was actual confessor to many young ecclesiastical students and to not a few laymen also; but one could never count those to whom he acted as counselor, guide, and friend. His pupils often took undue advantage of his kindness. He had regular office hours posted on a bulletin-board. But we all thought we were on sufficiently intimate terms with the master, we all thought our personal cases interesting enough, to justify us at any time in slipping past the janitor and dashing up the stairs that led to his hospitable door. I am ashamed to say that I often abused his complaisance in this way myself. But it was not only students. People not connected with the university, priests, nuns, men and women of all rank and station, thought themselves free to waste his time by carrying to him their problems, their grievances, their ambitions and desires—and sometimes for what petty things!

“He confessed to me on one occasion that during the whole week preceding he had had just two hours for undisturbed study. And when, sympathizing with the distress that this must have caused him, and expressing my regret that he was not left leisure to complete and publish so many works impatiently awaited by scholars, I ventured to criticize the thoughtlessness of these intruders, Monsignor Mer-

cier merely smiled. Once in a long while he would bring himself to closing his door and locking it. And sometimes, too, when he felt completely overwhelmed, he would take refuge in a modest cottage he had bought at L'Hermite near Waterloo.

"We used to admire Monsignor Mercier's simplicity and humility. As a rule he wore no outward sign of his high honors in the Church. It was a real pleasure for him to go walking with his students about the gardens of the institute and to partake of their modest repasts.

"A characteristic trait of truly humble persons is that they will permit their inferiors to find fault with their work. I remember how embarrassed I was when Monsignor Mercier begged me, during my first year at the institute, to call his attention to anything in his lectures or in his books that appeared to me to be in need of correction. The same request he often made of others.

"Another striking aspect of his personality was his desire for continual improvement. I do not believe Monsignor Mercier was ever satisfied with any of his books in the form in which urgent needs of his courses or of his philosophical controversies obliged him to publish them. In his opinion, they were always hurried, always premature. It is said that during his years of teaching in Malines (1877-1882) he tore up his manuscripts at the end of each

year to oblige himself to work over all his materials from beginning to end. In successive editions of his books, scarcely any traces are to be found of the preceding texts.

“Monsignor Mercier liked people, he loved them profoundly. He was, moreover, a judge of men and an educator. He would talk with you, and, the first time, he would seem to be observing you hardly at all; but all the while he would be forming his estimate of you, from the intonations of your voice, the way you formed your sentences, the expression in your eyes, your manner and carriage. I doubt whether in all Belgium there was any one who better understood the art of attracting, holding, and guiding young men. He must have had that faculty in his blood. Whenever I try to visualize Monsignor Mercier, I have to picture him among students, especially among the students at the institute. That work was something that appealed to his heart. No professor at the University of Louvain ever won more love and respect than he; and the faithful disciples who went forth in such goodly number from the institute in the twenty-five years of his work there remained attached to him heart and soul.

“Monsignor Mercier was always on watch for the promise that youth held within itself. The education that he gave followed the plan by which he

had fashioned his own soul. His great aim was to make strong men of his students. But he regarded self-control and an awakened sense of responsibility as more salutary for the young than a timid prudence which too often stifled initiative. He preached a sanctification that would be attained rather by works than by renunciations. He was convinced that the man who really loves the Good and fills his days with labor will naturally avoid Evil. That accounted for the atmosphere of hard and intense application which prevailed at the institute, even, perhaps, to excess; for not a few students broke down under the strain."

This attitude of humble, courageous abnegation on the part of the man whom he had once befriended and who had now dropped wholly from view was bound in the end to make an impression on Leo XIII. Despite the complaints which had done the young prelate so much mischief, the Pope could not fail to recognize in him a noble servant of the Church. Mercier had been doggedly prosecuting a hard, ungrateful task, confident that ultimately, in spite of everything, the actual facts would come to the Pope's ear. Leo XIII had observed with keen satisfaction that new centers of Thomism kept springing up in various countries and that they were founded by former students of Louvain. He could

see that the use of French, whether in books or in oral instruction, had been in all cases the best means of promoting the dissemination of his favorite doctrines. And in that exalted sense of fairness for which he was known, he began to seek ways and means for ending a painful situation which he felt also to be unjust.

Cardinal Mazella, the prefect of the Congregation of Studies, had taken such a positive stand against Monsignor Mercier that he could hardly be asked to reverse himself. Mazella, however, died in the year 1898, and Leo XIII at once ordered Cardinal Satolli, the new prefect of the congregation, to reëxamine the papers relating to the Louvain Institute. Once more, but this time in an atmosphere free from excitement and with no great play of hostile influences, Monsignor Mercier's acts were subjected to a painstaking and enlightened review; and among the documents was found a memorandum which contained the prelate's justification of himself. As he read this brief, and recalled the many accusations made against Mercier, the Pope was heard to exclaim in a tone of regret and of affectionate esteem:

"We have been misinformed!"

The words spelled rehabilitation for the institute and for its president. Pope Leo shortly despatched Monsignor Vincenzo Vannutelli to Louvain bearing

a letter from Cardinal Satolli. The missive contained express approbation of Monsignor Mercier's methods and aims, and permission to make ample use of French in the teaching of Thomism. Relations between the rector of the university and the president of the Institute of Philosophy were, however, still strained. The Pope asked Monsignor Abbeloos for his resignation. He was determined that the work for Thomism should be put on a lasting basis at all costs. A new era of prosperity opened for Monsignor Mercier's institute; and it was to meet with no eclipse until the aged pontiff's death. In the year 1900 a delegation of teachers and students from Louvain went to Rome, to bear the homage of the institute to Leo XIII. In the public audience granted on that occasion the Pope said:

"I am glad to see at your head the professors of the Institute of Philosophy which I founded. The advanced studies pursued under Monsignor Mercier's direction are of service not only to the clergy. They are just as valuable to lay students who come to your institute to study philosophy, even though they may have taken degrees elsewhere. I am thinking, for example, of de Lantsheere, who has just been elected to the Belgian Chamber. That is why, though insisting that the philosophy of St. Thomas be studied in Latin, we have decreed that the lec-

tures should be given in French. My desire and my prayers are for the prosperity of my institute."

"The institute which I founded," "my institute!" These words of the Pope indicated an undeniable return of Monsignor Mercier to favor. His adversaries had failed. Not only that: in trying to injure him, they had made him; the trials to which he had been subjected had molded him into an ideal scholar and a saintly priest, creating and developing qualities which would shortly be making him equal to the most unforeseen and most redoubtable tasks.

CHAPTER VI

THE MIRACLE

IN thinking of an ecclesiastical seminary as an annex to his Institute of Philosophy, Monsignor Mercier had been seeking above all else some means of gratifying the imperious vocation he felt for his true career as an educator of the clergy. We have already seen how many obstacles beset his project in the beginning. Though he had obtained the Pope's approval, he had not won the bishops, nor the university. He could see that the problem of finding students would be a difficult one to solve.

Among the bishops, however, he had two friends in particular—Cardinal Goossens of Malines and his old teacher, Monsignor du Rousseaux. Those prelates decided to send him a few of the best students in their lower seminaries. Cautiously and diffidently a few others followed. At the opening of the school year in the month of October, 1892, the total enrollment was seven. Monsignor Mercier determined to begin work.

The first task was to find suitable quarters for the new community. At his wits' end, the president

finally rented the vacant wing of a building belonging to the Missionaries of the Scheldt. There he could arrange for a very modest apartment for himself, and perhaps half a dozen cells for the students.

As a professor at the university, he had hitherto been occupying a spacious and cosily furnished house. This tranquil abode, which must have been very alluring to a man of literary pursuits, he decided to abandon at an age when people are, as a rule, specially sensitive to external comforts; and he moved into a badly appointed and often noisy building, with the prospect of having to undergo all the privations and face all the embarrassments inseparable from public or semi-public institutions. In this, to be sure, he was yielding to an impulse stronger in his nature than any consideration of comfort, "having always dreamed," as he himself said, "of passing my life and ending my days among young men preparing for the ministry of Christ."

The inconveniences of a haphazard "plant" were to be felt there, indeed, for a long time. There was no chapel in the establishment, no "office" for the president other than the common living-room. His private "dining-room" was a seat at the table of the other students in the general refectory. What furniture there was came from his former residence. Being still the sole incumbent of the chair of Thomist philosophy at Louvain, Monsignor Mercier

could not personally attend to all the details of installation. He employed a priest of the parish to help him set things in order. The worthy cleric in question seemed to infer that in accordance with the Aristotelian principles held in such honor in the house everything should be arranged by categories. On returning one evening from a lecture, the president found in one cell all the beds, in another all the desks, in a third all the wardrobes. He was compelled to look for some other steward who would not be so preoccupied with the "Arbor Porphyri." The young seminary began its life among just such embarrassments, which were, for that matter, the theme of unending mirth.

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To provide good discipline in his house from the start and assure himself a relative degree of quiet, Monsignor Mercier might at once have drawn up a "rule" and judged his students by the way they observed it. He thought it wiser to let experience dictate such permanent regulations and for the time being to trust to personal example and suggestion to keep his young charges to the path of duty. He thought a body of customs would gradually form from the exigencies of daily life; and such a "rule" would find its legitimacy in the conscience and the common sense of the students.

Relations between the prelate and his young men

were most simple and cordial from the outset. He ate at the same table with them, and thus gained the double advantage of being able to show them his affectionate personal interest and to teach them dignified manners. The first part of each meal was devoted to reading aloud; during a second period talk became general, with special encouragement for discussion of the current affairs of the institute. Monsignor Mercier listened attentively to the opinions of the boys and even asked them for their advice as occasion presented itself. If there was any great difference of opinion among them, he had them settle it by a show of hands. "Let's vote, let's vote!" the seminarists would cry, and the prelate would good-naturedly accept the opinion of the majority, unless, of course, he saw some material objection to so doing. This sort of government could not continue as the community grew larger—as early as the second year it had to be abandoned. But traces of it always remained in the institution—a spirit of filial, almost childish, trust in the man who placed so much trust in others, and less as a device of diplomacy than as a need of his boundless good nature.

Cardinal Goossens, as was noted above, was keenly interested in the Mercier enterprise; and one day he paid a visit to the new-born community. Afternoon tea was served in the refectory. With the

greatest simplicity and naturalness in the world, Monsignor Mercier showed this prince of the Church to a chair in the midst of the little group of students. What could the cardinal have thought of such a thing? No one in the seminary knew, but the young men were infinitely grateful to their principal for such an honor.

Each day saw the bonds between him and his future priests grow tighter. Monsignor Mercier had undertaken to form characters by a constant appeal to conscience. The method demonstrated its worth in excellent results. The affection the seminarists felt for the man they addressed as "Monseigneur," but venerated as a parent, sought all possible opportunities for expression—the recurrence of his birthday was one of them. And Monsignor Mercier liked such unpretentious celebrations. For him they were occasions for some of those delightful "toasts" of his, little speeches of infinite subtlety and charm, in which he found a way to introduce suggestions as profitable in substance as they were pleasant in form. And their effect was to be measured not only in the joyous smiles that overspread the faces about him, but as well in the enthusiasm for the noble cause they were serving that flamed in all hearts. Twelfth Night and, shortly, the anniversaries of certain events in the history of the seminary, were celebrated in the same modest way. But Monsignor

Mercier refused to monopolize such expressions of esteem. He had appointed the Abbé Simons, a recent graduate of the university, as his assistant at the institution with the title of Assistant Regent. Not satisfied with showing the most considerate deference to Abbé Simons on all occasions, Monsignor Mercier insisted that the young instructor's birthday be celebrated each year with the same ceremonies as his own, not only to do public honor to the devotion of a humble colleague, but to win for him the same affectionate respect that he himself enjoyed. This little trait was but one of the many private and daily manifestations of that high-mindedness which public events were later to reveal so strikingly.

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Such considerateness was not confined to the young priest who helped him. Each of the seminarists in turn was the object of some similar solicitude. He treated them all with the most exquisite thoughtfulness. Though his own moments were so precious, the eminent prelate listened with smiling patience to the youthful, often naïve, suggestions the students made in connection with their studies. He received everybody—his door was never locked—and the student always went away from the conference with the impression that he had been listened to with as much deference as a doctor of the Sor-

bonne. To one of the young men he said one day:

"I see you are giving a lecture this evening at the Philosophy Club. I am sorry that I am not free. I should like to hear what you have to say about poetry. I have always wanted to know more about the real secret of its charm."

And the remark was not mere encouragement—its humility was as sincere as its phrasing was simple. Such modesty, combined with unfailing concern for the feelings of others, was translated, whenever an occasion offered, from words into deeds. It was a tradition at the seminary that vespers on Church holidays should be celebrated by the prelate himself. One day, the festival of the Purification, the priest who had been officiating for that week (one of the few ordained clergymen who ever resided in the house) forgot this custom, went to the sacristy, and donned his ceremonial garments. A moment before the hour set for the service, Monsignor Mercier opened the door, saw the priest already garbed, and withdrew without being seen.

He lavished an almost maternal care upon his pupils. Knowing well how hard they had to work during the week in preparation for their university courses, he forbade them to study at all on Sundays. Just before the long vacations he would invite them one by one to his room and ask them as a favor to write to him. One year it chanced that he was not

able as usual to take this personal leave of them. He stopped, on the last morning, after the gospel in the mass, and in a few touching words bade them affectionate adieu. But in all this benevolence there was no tendency on Monsignor Mercier's part to spoil his charges with sentimentalities. He was a foe of the university policy of allowing full liberty to students, especially to students for the priesthood. Smoking, for example, he permitted only as a rare exception. He was utterly opposed to what he called "college morals," and any one who seemed to be tempted in that direction was reprimanded with such severity that discipline was always maintained in the seminary with a fear tempered with reverence.

Between the years 1892 and 1895, it will be remembered, a severe epidemic of influenza counted numerous victims in all the countries of Europe. Although the disease was not particularly dangerous to young people, it was nevertheless a disquieting peril to every one. It made its way into the little community at Louvain. No nurses were available; so the prelate himself manned the breach, going about from bed to bed, a bottle of medicine in his hand, but contributing almost as much by his brightness and cheerfulness of spirit to combat the epidemic.

A survivor of those distant years recently wrote:
"I have scarcely laid eyes on Monsignor Mercier

since the day when circumstances forced me to leave Louvain; but the memory of the incomparable master has never once deserted me."

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A tempest as terrible as it was unexpected was shortly to disperse this little group of students. The same events which all but destroyed Monsignor Mercier's Institute of Philosophy also shook the new seminary. The bishops called home their charges and most of the other boys were summoned by their parents to leave the pleasant environment where they had found life so agreeable under the direction of a saintly priest now fallen under suspicion. A few, however, remained. The annual openings never failed to take place at the prescribed date though sometimes there were only three or four students.

In this dolorous situation Monsignor Mercier placed himself wholly "in the hands of God," with a serenity and a self-control which once more excited the admiration of his associates. One word spoken in the intimacy of the seminary where he enjoyed such ascendancy would sometimes have sufficed to correct, at least in the minds of his own students, certain misapprehensions which were injuring his prestige. That word he never uttered, partly out of a scruple of humility, partly out of an impulse of superhuman charity.

One day a document issued by a Roman Congregation arrived in Belgium. It dealt in a tone most mortifying for Monsignor Mercier with the place which a Higher Institute of Philosophy should occupy in the organization of a university. Not only was it published in the newspapers without warning to him; it became the talk of all society in the capital before he learned by chance of its existence through one of his students who had read the complete text in the public press. Naturally the students at the seminary were much excited. Shortly afterwards, however, a new communication came from the Vatican, modifying the first in a sense very favorable to Monsignor Mercier. Nothing could have been more tempting than to have it published in the newspapers which had printed the first article. The prelate's conduct in the matter, and the motives which dictated his decision, he was later to describe himself:

"When the paper came into my hands, I wondered whether my duty to the institute did not oblige me to take full advantage of the opportunity which Providence seemed to have given me for re-establishing the truth. But I could hear a sort of voice whispering within me: 'You can, if you choose, defend yourself; here you have the means in your very hands; but, in that case, your defense will be the defense any human being could make of himself.

If, on the contrary, you rely on Me, I will take care of you, and your cause will be sustained by all the power of your God.' . . . After that I dismissed the idea of using the document from my mind."

Matters, in fact, followed their due course, and not long afterwards public opinion throughout the country had turned in the prelate's favor.

Another incident, dating from that same period, throws into relief his great thoughtfulness and delicacy toward his colleagues in the clergy, as well as his profound humility. At the time in question, people in high places were discussing with considerable heat the propriety of his using French in the teaching of philosophy in his institute. A synod of the Belgian bishops was about to convene at Malines. The atmosphere was tense. The president's adversaries were waging a hot fight for the suppression of French, knowing full well that success on their part would strike a noisy and perhaps a fatal blow at the prelate's enterprise.

Monsignor Mercier was summoned to the meeting. He had already committed the outcome to the hands of Providence, but he still felt the need of prayer, and entered the cathedral for further communion with God. When he had finished, long hours still separated him from assembly time. Where should he spend them? He thought of visiting a colleague. But, in the state of mind then prevailing,

contact with Mercier would have compromised any one. Rather outrage and loneliness for himself than the least hurt to a friend! He took refuge in the Grand-Séminaire, seeking out a remote corner in that vast establishment in the hope that he could sit there without being seen. It was a dark November day. The seminarists were just returning from their weekly hike in the country. As they were crossing a hallway, the prelate caught sight of one of his former students, and, to keep himself in countenance, he called to him, leading him away into a dimly lighted room that they might talk in peace. The young man never knew the service he had rendered his great teacher at a moment when the latter was opposed, attacked, and, for the most part, abandoned, in one of his noblest missions.

Some months later, the Pope was solemnly to decide in Monsignor Mercier's favor, and the city of Malines was to acclaim as its archbishop the man whom it had so recently sheltered as an outcast!

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Meanwhile, however, the censure emanating from Rome had put most of Monsignor Mercier's pupils to flight. In 1897, the number of candidates for the priesthood had been reduced to fifteen; and the enrollment of lay students at the institute had dwindled in like proportion. The buildings were nearing completion at that moment. They seemed

fated to remain a collection of deserted halls. Future prospects did not make the present any easier to bear. Out of the fifteen students left in the seminary, seven were to leave at the next vacation, either because they would have finished their studies or for other cogent reasons. Unless Providence came to the rescue, the end was in sight.

Monsignor Mercier, however, never lost faith that the Lord would provide; and he announced a series of supplications to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, pleading that at the beginning of the next term the community might have twenty-five members. A few months later, and contrary to all expectations, some of the older students found that they could remain to pursue advanced studies. Some foreigners came in from America, from Poland, from Ireland. On the eve of the first Friday in December, exactly twenty-five candidates were on hand, ready to sing a mass of thanksgiving to the Sacred Heart on the following morning.

This result strengthened faith in every one. One of the seminarists had observed that the new Litanies of the Sacred Heart recently approved by Leo XIII contained thirty-three invocations. He suggested supplications for thirty-three members at the opening of the next term. The prayers were more fervid than ever. Once more the Lord proved

docile. On the appointed day thirty-three seminarists were gathered about Monsignor Mercier.

With the plant then available, no greater prosperity could be hoped for—the house was full. It was deemed wiser to offer no more prayers! Students and faculty took it for granted that the enrollment would automatically maintain itself, all the more since there had now been a favorable turn in public opinion. At the beginning of the next term, the community dropped to twenty-nine!

The lesson was immediately grasped. As Canon Simons relates:

“We had to make amende honorable for our excess of natural faith by a display of supernatural faith. This time, again, Monseigneur was bold. He decided to petition the Sacred Heart for a progressive increase in numbers so that at the end of three academic years the seminary should be harboring . . . twice twenty-nine students!”

Monseigneur was bold indeed! The institution had been organized for a community of thirty at the most. To try for sixty more or less was to go borrowing trouble in connection with housing and other material needs. But that could be arranged! Providence had provided Monsignor Mercier with a very generous Mæcenas who also had great faith in miracles—the Canon Thiéry, Monsignor Mercier’s faithful professor at the Institute of Philos-

ophy. Professor Thiéry promised to assume the costs of any new buildings that should be needed; and he actually began work on them in the certainty that the "bold prayers" would be efficacious. Supplications began. Every one believed. Every one waited. When the three years were up, the number of students in the "seminary of Leo XIII" was fifty-eight! No more and no less!

"Those are the facts," adds M. Simons, "you may make of them what you will; but at any rate one may imagine the religious fervor aroused at the seminary by Monsignor Mercier's example of tender, trustful piety."

Such signal favors from above demanded a striking testimonial of gratitude. At the earliest possible moment, the president led a delegation of his seminarists to Paray-le-Monial, where a service of unanimous and fervent thanksgiving to "Jesus the Supreme Priest" was sung in the Chapel of the Visitation; and the prelate caused a commemorative plaque to be set up in the choir of the chapel, inscribed with the following words:

RECTORES ET ALUMNI SEMINARII CLERICORUM LOVANIENSIS NOMINI LEONIS XIII DEDICATI, SACRO JESU CHRISTI CORDI DE PRÆSENTI TUTELA, NUMERO DISCIPULORUM MIRABILITER AUCTO, GRATIAS EGERUNT.

"The masters and students of the Seminary of Leo XIII in Louvain here gave thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the divine protection whereby the number of students in that house was miraculously increased."

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Such acts throw the personal piety of Monsignor Mercier into high relief and indicate the ascetic trend of the religious training he imparted to his young men. Prayer, as was natural, held the place of honor among the religious exercises of the seminary. During the first few months the president did his best to demonstrate its importance and teach its method; then, following his principle of cultivating a fastidious conscience, a sense of responsibility in his future priests; knowing, too, that later on in life they would have for the most part no witness of their devotional acts save God, he tried to instil in each the habit of daily meditation in the privacy of the cell. It seems, one might add, that the results of this practice never quite measured up to the hopes the prelate had of it. To another exercise, Monsignor Mercier attached great importance, the monthly "collect" or contemplation, this, however, performed in public. One Sunday each month was devoted to pious concentration lasting from six in the morning to eight at night. The service comprised a joint recital of the breviary (all the young men participating, though they had not yet taken

their orders); two periods of private meditation in the cells; high mass, vespers, and benediction; two sermons, the longer of which, the one in the evening, Monsignor Mercier preached himself. A single period of recreation was allowed just after the midday meal.

It was in the evening sermon referred to that the most inspired utterances seemed to pour from Monsignor Mercier's heart. He was deeply concerned to deliver the sermon himself; but it was understood that, as a mark of respect for his youthful auditors, he would never speak unless he had worked a week on the sermon. In case so much leisure had not been granted him, the "collect" was postponed to the following Sunday. These days would sometimes find the students engaged in feverish preparation for their examinations. All, however, closed their books, laid aside their notes, and not one of them ever thought of stealing a minute of such hours consecrated to things spiritual and eternal.

Monsignor Mercier thought liturgical magnificence even more important for the worship of the priest than for that of the layman. He would have preferred beautiful services in the little chapel of the seminary from the start as an aid to the religious spirit among his charges. But what could be done in a tiny sanctuary fifteen feet square, a third of it occupied by the altar? Fortunately, the architect

who had provided for the construction and decoration of the splendid chapel of the Institute of Philosophy was waiting only for an opportunity to bring the liturgy in all its beauty to the seminary. A room of suitable dimensions was at last made available and converted into a chapel. From then on divine service unfolded with all the splendor incident to the observance of the rules. The Gregorian plainchant was adopted by Monsignor Mercier even before the ordinances of Pius X were proclaimed. He was also one of the first to restore sacerdotal vestments of the ancient and specially magnificent design. It was soon noticed abroad in the upper seminaries that the students prepared by Monsignor Mercier were always the best trained in ceremonial observances. Those who had feared that the intensive intellectual effort he required might desiccate the souls of these young men were henceforth reassured.

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What with the superintendency of his seminary, the presidency of the institute (where building was still in progress), the preparation of his lectures, and the writing of his books, Monsignor Mercier had scarcely a moment when he could even think of taking a vacation. Yet he would not let himself forget Braine-l'Alleud, where the woman whom he called "his sainted mother" had now found her

grave, and where a numerous company of nephews and other relatives gathered about him whenever he paid them his rapid visits. On the other hand, in proportion as the burden of intellectual concerns and administrative duties grew heavier, he felt greater need to free himself from the slavery of friendships and interviews, were it only for a few days at a time, to be able to finish one of his absorbing literary productions in the quiet of the country. But with whom could he seek such refuge, now that his own family had scattered?

One day his eyes fell upon a workingman's cottage located just outside a hamlet called L'Hermite, in the neighborhood of Braine. It happened to be for sale. The house lay in a calm, secluded spot, not too far from the various homes of his relatives. The rude simplicity of the structure was in keeping with his conception of evangelical poverty. He bought it. After a little remodeling, he moved thither a few pieces of his furniture and the books he needed to have at hand even during vacation times. The place became the country retreat he had long dreamed of, and it was destined to shelter the prelate's rare moments of leisure to the end of his life. Not that he fled to this hermitage to bury himself in his books: his favorite recreation there was, as he said, "to play priest," to replace, that is, the curés of the neighborhood in the care of their sick and in the

services in their churches. Those overworked clergymen were only too happy to take advantage of such kindnesses in order to enjoy a few days of rest themselves.

At Louvain the period of contention and strife had come to an end. Monsignor Mercier's reputation had gained ground progressively in Belgium, in Europe, and in the Americas. Widely known and universally loved as president both of the Institute of Philosophy and of the Seminary of Leo XIII, he saw a circle of alumni widening about him each year, and coming back to Louvain at each commencement to pay him admiring homage. He was at the height of his literary productivity. Everything seemed to presage for him the enjoyment of a long period of fruitful literary toil in the bosom of the university.

Nevertheless, he began to hint from time to time to his closer friends that he was feeling the weight of age, that a post as president emeritus would not seem unattractive to him. Was it a hankering for greater leisure that he might bring his philosophical writings to completion? We may be sure that it was something else. His institute was now fully organized, highly esteemed, securely established on bases that guaranteed a long and peaceful future for it. A spirit like his must have felt, who can say how consciously, the need for a more active, a more perilous, field in which to deploy its powers. In any event,

if the prelate ever dreamed of retiring to a studious solitude, any number of his friends had different plans for him.

Cardinal Goossens, archbishop of Malines, had just died, and quite suddenly; in fact, the details of his passing were still unknown at Louvain. There was doubt whether he had even been able to receive the last sacraments. Monsignor Mercier was much concerned on the point and, on the day in question, expressed his anxiety to his assistant, the Abbé Simons, as they were taking their usual walk together after the midday meal.

The abbé knew that on other occasions when certain episcopal sees had become vacant, public opinion had pointed to Monsignor Mercier as the man to fill them.

"It is probable, Monseigneur," said he, "that your name will be mentioned again, this time for the archbishopric of Malines!"

"Oh, I don't believe that; I've caused too much trouble in my day."

"You have fewer opponents now than you ever had. But, however that may be, you certainly have hosts of influential friends; and they will be only too happy to present and support your candidacy."

"No, no, you are surely mistaken! In that direction there's nothing for us to fear. . . ."

The doorkeeper just then appeared with a letter sent by special delivery from Malines.

"It's from the dean of the chapter," remarked Professor Simons, "I recognize his writing."

"You are right," answered the prelate; and hurriedly opening the letter he glanced at the first lines.

"The cardinal received the last rites," he said calmly; but then, all of a sudden, his companion saw him start. "How can I do that? . . . Imagine what this good dean wants of me! To deliver the cardinal's funeral oration! He can't really mean it! I am not the orator for such an occasion. It's ridiculous!"

"Monseigneur, a first sign from Providence!"

A colleague came up. New complaints!

"See what they are writing me! . . . In the first place I haven't the voice to fill a church like the Métropolitain of Malines. I must decline!"

"That, Monsiegnur, is not the opinion of those who know you. Accept, since you have been chosen!"

The prelate was still perplexed. He left his companions and betook himself to the chapel to confide his doubts to God. Finally he decided to go to Malines, in order, if possible, to be excused from the task. But the vicars of the chapter had known what they were about. They stood by their choice, which had, in their minds, an ulterior significance. A few days later the talk of Belgium was the probable

nomination of Monsignor Mercier to fill the vacant metropolitan see.

The truth was that some of the prelate's former students, who now occupied important positions, had urged their old master's elevation to the archbishopric upon Monsignor Vico, the papal nuncio in Brussels, as well as upon the King of Belgium. Both had entertained the proposition favorably. This was known to every one; but still every one awaited the verdict of Rome, weighing the chances of success and failure.

Monsignor Mercier had fled to his hermitage near Braine-l'Alleud and was peacefully working on one of his books. There a missive from the papal nuncio came to him—Pius X had named him Archbishop of Malines! The date was the seventh of February in the year 1906. Desiré Mercier was then fifty-five years old.

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Monsignor Mercier had had due warning of what was going on; nevertheless, in his humility he would fain have persuaded himself "that there must have been some mistake." Strong in his trust in God, he stood unmoved before the formidable responsibility now being thrust upon him.

After an obligatory visit to the papal nuncio at Brussels, he was expected back in Louvain. There he hurried straight to the Seminary of Leo XIII,

where he arrived at the dinner-hour. Quite simply and naturally he took his customary seat at table with his young men. Should they begin the reading as usual? The impulse to applaud was too great to be controlled. The refectory broke into joyous acclamation. The president rose to his feet. The moment had come for a word of farewell. Very simply, in his accustomed manner, he spoke from his heart:

"This testimonial of affection which is the real meaning of your applause touches me more deeply than I can say in words, much more deeply than this news of my coming elevation to the plenitude of our ministry. That notification found me perfectly calm. I did not desire the honor to which I have been called. It is hard for me to realize that it is meant for me, even though it bears my name. I cannot get over the feeling that it must have been intended for some one else. My real hope was to pass the rest of my days in this house, which I looked upon as my nest, where everything is dear to me, where everything has a little bit of myself about it. . . . And that is the feeling that still fills my heart, at this moment when Providence has just seen fit to change the future I would have chosen for myself. But, my dear friends, if the office to which I am called must perforce tear me away from you who are my family, my heart will remain with you. The Seminary of Leo XIII will have a special place in my affections

all my life long, and the sons of this privileged house will, for their part, keep alive, I trust, the same particular affection for me."

His words of farewell to the students of the university, a little less personal in tone, or rather, perhaps, a bit more official, were above all else a call to action:

"When I look into the future, and hear such formidable figures: two million two hundred thousand souls, more than two thousand priests; when I think of the schools, the colleges, the university, the parishes with all their religious and social activities, my heart is sometimes perturbed, as though I were afraid. But, my dear friends, I must not be afraid. . . . God knows me as I am, with my defects and my capacities. He has deigned to choose me just as I am. He will be my help. *Fiducialiter agam et non timebo*.—I shall stand fast in the faith and not be afraid. I shall neither lament a past which is no more, nor dream fatuously of a future which is not here. Man's duty bears on a single point—what shall he do in the present moment? . . . The present, then, is the only moment to consider; it is God's will that to-day we worship, that to-day we extol, and, be it with fear and trembling in our hearts, courageously perform."

On March 25, in the year 1906, Mercier received his consecration in the metropolitan church of Ma-

lines. The rites were administered by Monsignor Vico, the papal nuncio, surrounded by all the bishops of Belgium and many other prelates. The ceremonies, attended by a personal representative of the King and by delegates from the high ministries of state, was rather a demonstration of affection than a grandiose formality. Much was expected of the new archbishop. The time had come for him to show his full scope.

CHAPTER VII

THE ARCHBISHOP OF MALINES

THE great diocese of Malines, one immense network of religious, academic, and social organizations, had just been entrusted to an archbishop who had never participated directly, whether as curé, as vicar, or as missionary, in any sort of parochial work. The career of this scholar had been confined to the most theoretical branches of metaphysical speculation. What would he do now, when he found himself at the head of groups essentially designed for action—groups of all sorts: religious corporations, charitable brotherhoods, civic leagues, schools, labor unions, labor syndicates? How would he stimulate them, guide them, direct their activity for the best interests of religion in the diocese? Certain critics, to whom any man devoted to scholarly pursuits, any “intellectual,” as they say, is unfit for executive management, for “business,” must have judged that Pius X had been strangely inspired!

But at that moment, it should be observed, modernism was in its fullest swing. This subtle and pervasive error had made its way into all branches of

human knowledge. Finding its boldest supporters in the state universities, it had seeped into the upper seminaries. It was flaunting its doctrines in the bulletins of Catholic associations as well as in fashionable literary periodicals. It had tainted, or at least tempted, all youthful elements in the clergy which were interested in the general movement of ideas.

How explain this rapid conquest of Catholic minds, unless by the fact that, in one respect or another, the men of action who had been presiding over the various dioceses had failed to find the time, or perhaps the weapons, to check its victorious march? Knowledge does not hinder action, it enlightens action, as witness so many great men in the Church, who were learned doctors and, at the same time, artisans of conquest. Of this truth Pius X was fully aware. At that very moment he was writing his decisive encyclical against the new heresy.

At an hour so critical for the Faith in Belgium as elsewhere, it was well that a bishop of unquestioned scholarship should be found to exercise a conservative influence upon the country at large. The candidate for the archbishopric of Malines, had, in addition, to be a man of tested industry, wisdom, and even diplomacy. Monsignor Mercier united all these qualifications; though a scholar, he had successfully administered important educational insti-

tutions. In choosing him the Holy See had acted in full perception of the significance of what it was doing.

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The new archbishop succeeded a prelate of renowned piety, whose sense of moderation had never diminished his zeal for academic and social progress. Nevertheless, in spite of Cardinal Goossens' constant efforts in favor of "free" schools, ignorance in matters of religion was making headway in Belgium. The most subversive doctrines were gaining control of the laboring classes especially. It was no longer enough to think of the children. Something had to be done to reach the minds of adults. Monsignor Mercier set to work.

The scholarly theses he had expounded before students at Louvain were not suited to the present case. He had to translate his lessons into a simple language comprehensible to the humblest minds. Only in this way could the prelate now go on with his ministry of souls, realize the inspiring motto on his spiritual escutcheon: *Apostolus Jesu Christi*.

Did that mean that his long and intense study of philosophy would go for naught in his education of plain people? Here is an answer from one of his co-workers at that time, M. de Wulf:

"One thing must be made clear—it cannot be too often repeated: in Cardinal Mercier the man of ac-

tion was served by the man of learning, and without the latter, the former would not have been possible. In connection with the religious, social, and political problems of our time, any number of other men had said the very things he said in his speeches, his pastoral letters, his injunctions. Wherein lay the superiority of his thought, the secret of his intellectual kingship? In the unity indivisible that always prevailed between his teachings and his philosophical principles! The metaphysics, the ethics, the psychology which he had studied during his career as a professor vivified all that he did, said, wrote, commanded, during his career as an archbishop. Sometimes his philosophy comes to the surface and is readily identified. More often it remains underground, like the invisible foundations which support a great cathedral, acting as a base for the entire edifice of his thought."

In his first Lenten message, Monsignor Mercier gave an inkling of his future manner. He had noticed that in more than one diocese the very solemnity of the traditional phraseology tended to weaken its effect on people. Enough, therefore, of hackneyed generalities, conventional formulas! In a language still dignified, but simple, understandable, of luminous clearness, never shrinking from the familiar detail, nor even, on occasion, from the personal equation, the bishop leaned forward like an infinitely

tender father toward his numerous and diversified flock, distributing the bread of truth to them all, according to their several tastes or capacities for assimilation.

This paternal note characterizes his first pastoral message which dealt with the Christian life, its conditions, its obstacles, its charms and its rewards—rewards even terrestrial. Was ever argument simpler and more convincing?

“Christians are happy,” he declares. “If one may speak of joy, it is surely I, my brethren; for who better may bear witness to the inner joy of the soul than the one who experiences it? I bear my witness that in the course of my life, the more sincerely I have surrendered myself to God, the more faithfully I have followed his law of love, the greater the happiness I have known. I have shared the intimacy of many, many families; I have counseled souls of all ages and all stations; and wherever I have found a Christian spirit, there I have always found a spirit of happiness; and unhappiness has been there only in such measure as there was less faith in the power, the wisdom, and the love of God. I have known, on the other hand, misguided people upon whom everything seemed to be smiling, whom the world believed happy; yet in the end they would come and confess to me that they had had their mo-

ments of intoxication and forgetfulness, indeed; but that at heart, somehow, they were ashamed, distressed—unhappy! The parable of the Prodigal Son is the story of all who depart from God.”

The following year he sets out to clarify man’s duty toward God; and he thinks it best to restate the proofs of God’s existence, by phrasing in words intelligible to all the Thomist doctrine on that important fundamental truth.

For the Lenten season of 1908, the archbishop’s theme was set for him, one might say, by the recent condemnation of modernism in the encyclical *Pascendi* of Pope Pius X. In this connection a first service had to be rendered the members of his diocese: to give them an accurate definition of modernism and a clear perception of the significance of its errors. Everybody was talking modernism; no one was confessing infection with it—and precisely because the poison was working inward under cover of terms and formulas of ambiguous meaning, sapping the foundation of faith in so many hearts.

“Modernism,” says the Archbishop, “consists essentially in the statement that the religious soul should derive from itself, and only from itself, the object and the motive of its faith. It rejects all revelation as something imposed upon the conscience from without. It amounts, therefore, to a denial

of the doctrinal authority of the Church established by Jesus Christ and repudiates the hierarchy divinely constituted to rule Christian society."

The very definition implied condemnation of the error it revealed. Monsignor Mercier had only to develop it to demonstrate the propriety of the Pope's censure; and here again, his thorough mastery of the systems of thought emanating from beyond the Rhine enabled him to exhibit the essential vice of a doctrine which could not fail to disfigure, not to say demolish, Catholicism.

Meantime the Archbishop was attending conferences on the social question, promising to devote himself, as his predecessor had done, to the interests of the working classes, and launching a campaign that was to be lifelong to end the class struggle by enforcing respect of the reciprocal rights of capital and labor. Vocational training, domestic science, educational clubs, Catholic labor leagues and syndicates, mutual benefit associations, associations for farmers and for tradespeople, unions of manufacturers, business men, and engineers—all such activities fought for their portions of his zealous effort, his encouraging words, his days overfilled with effort.

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Rome kept close watch on the beginnings of this episcopacy. How could a man who had written so

many books and passed so many years in intercourse with the most distinguished scholars of the world, now find the necessary energy and the still more necessary adaptability to receive so many callers, write so many letters, show such great interest in so many activities, attend so many meetings, preside at so many ceremonies? Was not such devotion worthy of still further recognition from the head of the Church? Despite Monsignor Mercier's comparative youth, should Belgium not be given again the cardinal she was accustomed to see at the head of her ecclesiastical hierarchy? So thought Pius X; and on April 18, 1907, the red hat was bestowed upon the Archbishop of Malines. This was another and still closer bond between Monsignor Mercier and the Holy See; and the newly elected cardinal so interpreted it:

"To-day," he said, "as he receives from the hands of Pius X those insignia of the cardinalate which are an austere symbol of self-sacrifice even to one's blood, the Cardinal of Malines can only repeat, with greater emphasis, with greater feeling, if that be possible, one solemn filial vow: 'Most Holy Father, I am yours, in life and in death.'"

A few days later, the title of Cardinal was officially conferred upon him in Rome in the Basilica of St. Peter in Vinculis. Then, returning to Belgium, he made his appearance in the purple in the very

cathedral in which eleven years before he had taken refuge as a suspect shunned by all to confide his humiliation and his distress to God.

Excepting none of the members of his diocese from his solicitude, his benedictions, his acts of benevolence, the new cardinal nevertheless understood that the better part of his time and thought belonged to the moral welfare of his clergy. To increase the intensity of Christian life in his diocese, he needed saintly priests, and to have saintly priests, he needed theological students who would be filled from the outset with aspirations toward piety. Monsignor Mercier had worthy collaborators in this educational sphere; but could he entrust entirely to any one else a work so dear to his own heart?

"The students of my seminaries love me," he said upon his return from Rome, "with a filial love; when I see them, speak to them, clasp their hands, I feel they understand what is in my heart. The thought of them is with me everywhere. In Rome I celebrated mass for them at the tomb of the Apostles; at the feet of His Holiness, I implored for them the tenderest of blessings from the tenderest of fathers. Every morning, at the altar, as I hold the Host in my hands and bend my knee before it, my thoughts go out to these beloved sons of mine, to whom I shall pass on to-morrow the conquest of Christ's kingdom on earth."

Loving his students as he did, he felt an urge to do something for them, to have a personal share in their training; and he visited the seminaries and addressed them as often as he could find time to do so. From these talks came a little book which he entitled: "To My Seminarists."

The influence of this volume was felt by young priests far beyond the frontiers of his diocese. It contains, for the most part, interpretations of doctrine arranged as a course; not, however, in the dry expository style of his old lectures at the university, but in the simple, gentle, paternal manner of the early Fathers of the Church, whose authority, for that matter, he is constantly invoking. As one might suppose of a man whose own inner life was so richly and so intensely lived, and who spent a full hour every morning in intimate communion with the Holy Sacrament, Monsignor Mercier particularly stressed the efficacy of prayer as a means to spiritual growth. Prayer, says he, is "the soul's permanent relation, the heart's intimate and constant conversation with the living person of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and, through Him and by Him, the soul's ascent toward God." And most of the advice that fills the book derives from this conception of the fundamental importance of prayer. A few brief sentences at the end summarize his whole theory of clerical training:

“Cultivate your inner life all the more deeply in proportion as the demands of your ministry for outward action are the greater.

“Learn to love solitude, for there alone God speaks to your heart.

“Learn to discipline your tongues, that you may become masters of your thoughts.

“Be attentive and obedient to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, ‘for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. *Qui spiritu Dei aguntur, ii sunt Filii Dei*’ (Rom. 8: 14).

“At the foot of the cross, in your studies, at the altar, in all the occupations, amid all the distractions, of daily life, strive hungrily, energetically, perseveringly, to commune with God. ‘Pray without ceasing. *Sine intermissione orate*’ (I Thess. 5: 17).

“Be strict in your habits. In so far as you master your passions, so far will you assure your freedom of will, the efficacy of Divine Grace upon you, serenity in your inner lives.

“Never separate in your conduct two sentiments which comprise the sum of all aspirations to a saintly life: a humble distrust of your own powers, and a complete surrender of yourselves to childlike faith in Him whom we have the privilege and the joy of calling Our Father.”

That he might bring his own views of piety before

his priests as well, he announced in the summer of 1908 that he himself would conduct the "retreats" of that year. This meant that he would have personal interviews with hundreds of priests, exhorting them individually and often confessing them. The great number of clerics in his diocese made it necessary to divide them into five groups. He would accordingly have to repeat his "retreats" no less than five times. This enormous burden of extra work he carried through to the end on that occasion; and he was to do the same thing twice again in the following years, including one of the most tragic moments of the World War. From this work with his clergy came two volumes, the one entitled "Pastoral Retreats," the other, "The Inner Life." Though the counsel embodied in the former is always inspired by the highest wisdom and authority, its lofty tone does not, perhaps, sufficiently offset a certain dryness in style that may have resulted from the argumentative form the author had so long practised at the university. "The Inner Life" classes Monsignor Mercier not only among the eminent Thomists of his day, but also among the most interesting moralists of the ascetic type. It develops the contention that the priest is the true seer, the truly religious man, charged therefore with all the obligations this implies, but in addition, with all the duties incident to his status as a sacred person. A bold thesis, perhaps,

and surely a debatable one; though it reveals the high conception which the Cardinal, a born bishop, a born pastor of pastors, always had of the nature and functions of the priesthood.

The Cardinal next asked himself how he could carry to the masses—to the great population of toilers in the factories of the cities or on the farms in the country, in whom faith was either languishing or else buried under other interests—the same concepts and methods of piety which he had put before his priests and his theological students. For altogether too many Christians, he thought, religion seemed to be primarily a body of practices. There was too little attention to dogma, too much attention to conduct and morals; and this was to miss the essence of Christianity.

“The central point of church ritual,” the Cardinal accordingly proclaimed in a pastoral address, “is the act by which the Son of God made man, crucified, dead, and buried, triumphs over Death, becomes again a living man, strong, if I may venture such language, in the privilege of this prolongation of life, and in the power thus acquired of infusing into the living parts of the material body, which He has taken upon Himself, the grace, the glory, and, with these, the rapturous love, of Divine Life. In this communication of the life of the Holy Trinity to

our souls, in this communication of this life which is the one true Life, lies the essence of the Christian mystery."

Hence shortly, following out this principle, another pastoral letter on proper attitudes of worship during mass, on means of fomenting the religious experience of the Communion. But that was not all. The ascent of the soul toward God must be aided by majesty of ritual and especially by genuine church music. He made every possible effort to introduce the practice of congregational singing into his diocese. A celebration in honor of Edgar Tinel, a Belgian composer, gave Cardinal Mercier occasion to emphasize the power of sacred melodies as auxiliaries of prayer and to recall, following a lead of Pius X, the rules that such music should observe if it were to help the human soul in its quest of eternal beauty. He writes to Tinel:

"I am only a layman in music; but I think that I can divine something of the thrill your artistic soul must feel as, prostrate in spirit before the divine Victim on our altars, you muster all the resources of your thought, your sentiment, your voice, in an effort to bring to yourself, and to us the worshipers in His temple, the priests in His sanctuary, the music we should lift to God, when we would glorify Him, bless Him, adore Him."

These letters on doctrine and dogma the Cardinal

usually published at the beginning of Lenten seasons. His other exhortations or instructions to the great body of Christians were issued as occasion required. The most noted of such pastorals during his early years as cardinal was the one which he published in 1909 on the subject of the declining birth-rate in France and Belgium and on the duties of husbands and wives to be fathers and mothers. It was not yet customary to treat such themes from the pulpit nor in episcopal charges; and Cardinal Mercier's plain and forcible, but withal circumspect, language, coming upon the public as a novelty, proved to be a manifesto, all the more effective for its very moderation, against a state of mind which seemed to be menacing historic races of old Europe with decay and extinction.

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In the conditions prevailing in modern life in Europe, the priest is confronted with the distressing yet stimulating fact that as a rule he cannot bring worshipers to his services and encourage spiritual life in his parish until he has first organized the population entrusted to him into all sorts of societies, leagues, or groups ("works" they are called), which serve on one pretext or another to bring people under his ministering hand. Monsignor Mercier soon found himself caught in the congeries of leagues, federations, syndicates, corporations

which canalize the activity of Catholicism among the two million souls in the diocese of Malines. Down to the very end of his life such activities of "organization" contended not only for his honorary presence and his speeches, but also for his active supervision, for his detailed advice, and even at times for his money.

"To-day" writes Canon Caeymaex of this aspect of the Cardinal's work, "will find him at a congress of 'the Democratic League' or at some other convention of Catholic labor. To-morrow will see him presiding over a general or a district assembly of the 'Conference of St. Vincent de Paul' or of the 'Society of St. Francis Xavier.' Now he is attending the general or jubilee convention of the 'Society of Peter's Pence,' or speaking before the 'Third Estate of St. Francis,' the 'League of the Holy Sacrament,' the 'League of the Daily Adoration of the Host.' He tries to be present at all eucharistic or liturgical 'days'; and especially at the solemn consecrations of the new year to the Sacred Heart, at the Church of Ste. Gudule in Brussels."

A large number of such societies existed before his appointment to his office. Not satisfied with encouraging each of them in its individual work, he determined to call them all to a great convention in Malines, in the year 1909, to give a public demonstration of the organized power of Catholics in Bel-

gium. This congress had a distinctly militant tone. The Cardinal was eager to show that despite all obstacles and opposition, especially from Socialism, Catholicism had not interrupted its conquering march even in Europe. He himself delivered a ringing speech in admiration of the Catholics of France, who were sacrificing their material resources in order to remain faithful to the Church in the face of anticlerical oppression.

The closing meeting of the congress was held on the Grand-Place at Malines, in the presence of relics assembled from all over Belgium. It was a ceremony of incomparable splendor, and made the Cardinal feel "he was the general of a great army capable of winning the most difficult victories."

Another striking pronouncement of Cardinal Mercier was the long and well-documented lecture which he delivered (in the year 1908) before the annual assembly of the Social Welfare League of Liège. The speech itself denounced the economic, physiological, and moral ravages of alcoholism; but the Cardinal gave point to his moral by publicly pledging himself to total abstinence from wine and all other fermented beverages.

To supervise so many interests obliged Cardinal Mercier to make rapid journeys to one point or another of his vast diocese, and this he could do only

by using the vehicle that is, so to speak, imposed upon present-day executives by the facts of modern life—the automobile. This means of locomotion was, however, noted by certain adversaries of the Church in Belgium. Not finding any other vulnerable point in the Cardinal's life, they pointed out that he was not traveling with the same simplicity as the first disciples. A Socialist newspaper in Brussels, "Le Peuple," on one occasion voiced the accusation in a leading article, in terms as trite as they were offensive. That the Cardinal had the makings of a doughty publicist, had he chosen to exercise the gift, is apparent from his reply to the editor:

"Why must you repeat once more in an article in which you pretend to some manners a silly insinuation which has no other intent than to make me an object of hatred to the laboring population of Belgium? 'Monsignor Mercier arrived by auto, doubtless to remind us of Christ's entry into Jerusalem on an ass'?

"Were I actually to travel donkey-back, would you not accuse me of being twenty centuries behind the times?

"I travel by auto, because the automobile is the only means of transportation which will allow me to address a labor union in Antwerp at noon and to visit a home for the aged in Les Polders at Stra-

broeck, at four o'clock in the afternoon. What harm is there in that?

"I do not have the honor of knowing you, Monsieur Dewinne, who have just picked up in our petty press (where it has been going the rounds for two years past), the witty (!) insinuation I am objecting to. I am sure, however, that you sometimes travel by railroad, and (who knows?) perhaps in the second class. Shall I, in my turn, say that in doing that you are trying to show yourself the equal of your 'comrades,' who ride third class on commutation tickets? Or the equal of our poor peasants who drag painfully along on foot to save the expense of the country local; or who still resort to that time-honored vehicle of Belgium, the dog-cart?

"Oh, how I detest such boorish efforts to misrepresent the intentions of others! Is not courtesy still—not to say, especially—a duty toward those whom one regards as adversaries?"

Such severity was not in the Cardinal's more usual manner. He never took pleasure in catching opponents at fault.

Cardinal Mercier was a Belgian, and he was proud of being one. He deliberately tried to help with all his influence in developing a patriotic spirit in a country where differences of race had long delayed the growth of this sentiment to self-consciousness.

"Our government," he wrote, "is responsible for our national union; it sees to its maintenance, guides its activity, assures its continuity and development, and helps to consolidate its traditions. . . . By virtue of these functions, it exercises over citizens a paternal care, which justifies the name of fatherland, and deserves, in return, a filial affection."

He desired that due homage be paid to the reigning dynasty, and especially to King Leopold II for the splendid feat which opened up central Africa to Christian civilization and endowed Belgium with a great and valuable colony. Such homage he himself rendered in speeches or pastoral charges inspired, as he thought, by merest justice; and, on Leopold's death, he invoked the gratitude of the nation for the memory of the sovereign whom he regarded as one of the principal artisans of the country's greatness.

This patriotic activity of the Cardinal, the nobility of his words, and the disinterestedness of his participations in public life, won him an increasing admiration and affection, not only in his diocese and in Belgium, but beyond the frontiers of the country and especially in France, where he was recognized as a distant, but none the less genuine, offshoot of the the Gallic race.

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On the occasion of the unveiling of a statue to

Bossuet in the cathedral at Meaux, Monsignor Marbeau, the bishop of that diocese, selected Cardinal Mercier, as the best fitted of the foreign prelates in attendance at those ceremonies, to glorify the "eagle of Meaux." The assignment was a difficult one: the Cardinal had to speak after Jules Lemaître, the official delegate of the French Academy. Jules Lemaître's capacities as a charmer of audiences have become historic. He had a delicately shaded art, where every resource of diction adorned a scholarly substance with a captivating style. His homage to Bossuet at Meaux was a work of sheer delight. Cardinal Mercier was not in his best form. His voice was a trifle shrill, his delivery at times nervous and hurried. At its best it never had at its command Lemaître's range of musical inflection. His study on Bossuet, sound, meaty, the product of careful research, was, moreover, in a somewhat professional style. It could bear no comparison with the winged panegyric of the critic from Paris. His eulogy was received with esteem rather than with enthusiasm. But, without his suspecting it, his trip to Meaux won him a favor of a much more significant bearing. It was during the services in the cathedral at Meaux that a great concourse of non-Belgian prelates first met this cardinal who held his deep, clear eyes fixed in ecstatic adoration on the Host. Every one was impressed by his humility, his gentleness,

his irresistible personality. From that occasion dates his eminence for saintliness among his colleagues. The author of these pages was vouchsafed an opportunity to conceive an affectionate and personal admiration for him at that time. The Vicar-General of Meaux had been invited, with Monsignor Ladeuze, rector of the University of Louvain, to act as the Cardinal's escort during the various ceremonies of the day. In driving about from one place to another, he had been struck by the sweet simplicity, the constant self-effacement that distinguished all the Cardinal's acts. In the evening, after the Salutation of the Holy Sacrament, the Cardinal, still kneeling at his cathedra, asked a modest favor of his assistant.

"Monseigneur, we were called here to unveil a statue of Bossuet. But I have been so absorbed in the various ceremonies of the day that I have not yet had even a glimpse of it. Could you tell me just where it is?"

"It is at the other end of the cathedral, Eminence. I shall esteem it an honor to guide you to it at your leisure. With your permission, I would suggest waiting till the congregation has withdrawn."

The Cardinal rose from his knees, sat down, resumed his inner concentration in prayer. In a quarter of an hour, perhaps, the nave of the church had emptied. The vicar-general then preceded him

toward the far end of the basilica. But suddenly the guide's vestments caught on the nail on the leg of a chair. He was stopped short. And then this prince of the Church, a cardinal already famous in two continents, bent in his purple mantle to the pavement as spontaneously and as naturally as could be, to release the entangled robes of his subordinate. An incident negligible in itself! But it was one of those little acts of quick considerateness which endeared Monsignor Mercier to all who approached him.

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In November of the year 1910, the members of a students' club in Paris decided to celebrate the centenary of Montalembert, the great Catholic orator, an anniversary which memories of rather acrimonious controversy had deprived of more solemn recognition. At the risk of seeming to take sides in a quarrel which was an affair of Frenchmen only, the Belgian cardinal consented to go to Paris; for one reason, because of his interest in students, but also because he was glad of a chance to celebrate, even before a modest assemblage of young men, the genius of a great defender of the Church. But how could such an avowed supporter of orthodoxy laud a Catholic "liberal" who, in a famous speech at the Congress of Malines in 1863, had argued for "a free church in a free state"? Frankness had always been one of the powerful elements in Monsignor

Mercier's character, as it had been in his professorate. He did not seek to condone the doctrine of a fighter momentarily in error because of a noble passion for liberty.

"But," he added, "that was the only blemish on the brilliant career of this champion of the Church. It was an error, moreover, deriving from insufficient enlightenment, not from dereliction of will. It could never efface the memory of long and loyal services rendered by Montalembert to the cause of Catholic truth. . . . Montalembert always rejected compromise, whatever the consequences to his personal interests; he remained steadfastly faithful to the ideal of his large-minded youth. This passionate cult of Christian duty he practised at times in a manner that suggests pride, moodiness, sullenness, but always with unfailing unselfishness, unfailing courage. Those who were witnesses of his life on earth will ever think of him as the model of the true and the valiant Christian knight."

On the subject of advanced philosophical study, to which he had devoted the largest part of his life, Cardinal Mercier wrote one of his most significant opinions in the "Écho de Paris":

"It has," he said, "often been observed, that the purpose of humanistic studies is not to furnish or enrich the mind, but to form it. In similar fashion the purpose of advanced study in philosophy is to mold a

few elect intelligences, that they may make free disinterested investigation of the material world or of the human mind, with a view to formulating more comprehensive syntheses and to opening up new paths for disciples who will inherit their methods, their disappointments, their discoveries, and so from generation to generation keep burning in the hearts of an intellectual aristocracy the sacred fire of disinterested research. Our practical men, our bourgeois, will doubtless look upon such scholars as idle dreamers. So much the worse for our practical men and our bourgeois! Civilization needs these dreamers, just as it needs poets and artists, just as it has benefited in the past by its heroes and its saints."

In September, 1912, he was called to Vienna to lecture before the "Catholic Teachers' League of Austria." His theme there was the essential error of so-called "independent" ethics. Speaking as a philosopher and as a prelate, he contended that the only possible foundation for moral education is the subordination of the will to an absolute Good.

Meanwhile the clear-sightedness of the philosopher was beginning to arouse in the heart of the patriot fears which other people, alas, then regarded as without foundation.

"Desiré Mercier," writes Monsignor Baudrillart, "perceived what many powerful minds discovered

only in the light of a burning Louvain: the peril, namely, which German philosophy, the thought of Kant and Hegel and their more recent disciples, concealed under a seductive exterior, because of the corollaries of all sorts that necessarily flow from it: no longer any certain basis for knowledge; no unshakable authority as a source of morality; science separated from metaphysics, metaphysics from ethics, ethics from God; man the sole master of his moral being, autonomous, indeed, but slave to all the fluctuations of a reason beyond control, of a conscience without principles; in practice, therefore, Might as a source of Right, and an omnipotent sovereign State, free to command anything, free to demand anything."

On October 2, 1911, the Cardinal addressed the magistrates, lawyers, attorneys, and notaries of the Brotherhood of St. Yves in Antwerp in the following significant words:

"No, Might is not Right! The use of force may be legitimate or illegitimate—that is to say, it may conform to or be contrary to Right; but the only legitimate use that any human government whatsoever can make of force is to place it at the service of Law, to the end that Law may be enforced and respected. Man himself is not Law; he does not even make Law; he is subordinated to it; and the social order which safeguards the maintenance of Law is

possible only on condition that individual wills be disposed, and that rebellious wills be, if necessary, constrained, to respect Law."

The hour was at hand when the Cardinal would fling these principles into the very face of a most redoubtable and cynical violation of the Law of which he had made himself the champion.

CHAPTER VIII

A FIGHTING CARDINAL

“**I**N Europe at large before the war,” writes M. Goyau, “the Archbishop of Malines had a certain reputation: he was known to cultivated people as a philosopher and a scholar—as an ‘intellectual’ of distinction. And this was, indeed, a tribute to his writings, but it was to miss the essence of the man. The man stood revealed only when the Great War came and filled in, so to speak, the outline of his real physiognomy.”

Up to that time Monsignor Mercier had been an educator to his country. It was now his rôle to act as its defender.

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On the outbreak of hostilities, the Cardinal's first act (August 1, 1914) was to salute the young men who were being called to the colors through words of hope and encouragement addressed to their families. Then thrilling with admiration at the King's heroic decision not to consent to the violation of Belgian neutrality he turned to his clergy:

“The nation is aroused,” he said. “Let us join

whole-heartedly in its heroic enthusiasm. Let us pray. Let us fast. Let us do penance. Let us urge fasting and penance upon Christian families for at least one day a week. Let us inspire believers everywhere to purer thoughts and more righteous conduct, that it may be God's pleasure to reward the far-sightedness of our leaders and the valor of our soldiers."

But the frontiers are violated! The insolent march of the invader halts only under the walls of Liège! There stands a Belgian general, calm, energetic, determined to fall, if need be, under the ruins of his city! And the Cardinal cries:

"Courage, my beloved brethren! Our right, we trust and believe, will triumph—nay, already it is triumphant, for all Europe is acclaiming the ability and the firmness of our generals, the heroism of our troops, the spirit of our nation!"

Meantime Pope Pius X dies of sorrow at this atrocious war which he foresaw and was unable to prevent. His successor has to be chosen. Stricken with anguish at the dangers he sees impending over his diocese, Cardinal Mercier departs for the conclave that is to elect Benedict XV.

But reports come pouring into Rome. Cities in Belgium are burning! Innocent people are falling by hundreds before the enemy's firing squads! Families are being terrorized by arbitrary imprisonments! The Cardinal leaves Italy precipitately and hurries

back toward his cathedral city. A few days later he is in Malines.

What a spectacle was to greet him in that Belgium already trampled underfoot and bleeding! Namur plundered, Louvain, Visé, Dinant, partly burned, the library of the university utterly destroyed, families homeless and starving, priests hunted down, arrested, executed without trial, as indeed without cause—such the country which a few weeks before had been bright with prosperity and tranquil happiness!

Destruction was beginning in Malines itself. Shrapnel bursting in the summer sky, roofs and towers thunderously crumbling, Belgian regiments sonorously tramping their rounds under the majestic and now tragic belfry of Saint-Rombaut, a gradual vanishing in flight of the more opulent citizens—all bespoke the great terror that hovered ominously over the city and filled the most stalwart hearts with apprehension. The Cardinal returned to a palace where the walls had already been riddled with shells; he resumed his work to the music of a cannonade that was shattering his windows and shaking every partition in his house.

On the morning of Sunday, the twenty-seventh of September, the bombardment redoubled in violence, this time taking the archbishop's palace itself as a

special target. The Cardinal, however, continued his customary labors in his study, his domestics cowering, terrified and trembling, in the corners about him. At last his private secretary, Canon Vrancken, grew worried and inquired as to his intentions.

"When the flock is in danger," the prelate replied, "the shepherd cannot desert his post!"

He had no thought of leaving Malines!

Toward noon the Cardinal ordered lunch for his secretary and himself. The footman in attendance all but dropped the dishes and their contents several times as shells burst in the neighborhood. It was ludicrous as well as terrifying, and the Cardinal could not repress a smile. Perfectly calm himself, he tried his best to reassure the man. In the afternoon large holes opened in the walls of the palace under the constant rain of shells and projectiles from machine-guns. The three servants in his household took refuge in the cellar and finally the prelate himself consented to join them there with his secretary. As evening came on, Canon Vrancken went to the City Hall for news. The burgomaster reported that the Germans would shortly be occupying Malines. His orders were to clear the place of all inhabitants. Would not the Cardinal set a good example by withdrawing as soon as possible? The pressure of events was proving master of the Cardinal! His own automobile he had given to the army. He accordingly

allowed a military van to be placed at his disposal, and, still accompanied by his secretary, left Malines that very evening (September 27) for Antwerp.

At that moment the renowned fortifications of the seaport city seemed to promise an impregnable rampart against the German onrush; but the little Belgian army, alas, was to enjoy only a momentary respite behind such useless walls. Two weeks had not passed before they yielded to the "big Berthas"! Then Albert's army was obliged to retire to the narrow strip of territory on the French frontier which, for four years, was to constitute the free Kingdom of Belgium!

When Antwerp fell, only one course was open to the Archbishop of Malines. He must return to his city, now terrorized by the German occupation, to defend his flock against the excesses of the conquerors. Before leaving Antwerp, however, he interviewed the German governor of that city, General von Huene, and obtained a promise that young Belgians remaining in invaded territories would not be taken to Germany, either to be enrolled in the army or to be employed at involuntary labor.

The Cardinal reëntered his palace at Malines on the twentieth of October. The German Government had just appointed a governor-general for Belgium—Baron von der Goltz—with headquarters in Brussels. The baron exchanged calls with Monsignor

Mercier and promised to coöperate with the archbishopric for the welfare of the civil population. Unfortunately he had little opportunity to carry out his good intentions, granting that he had them. He was replaced by Baron von Bissing on December 3.

Von Bissing had a formidable assignment. His task was to maintain order in a country sullenly chafing under a hated yoke, a country where smoking ruins on every hand were crying for vengeance, where the tears of widows and bereaved mothers were a daily protest against the insolent exultance of the invader, where a consciousness of right and hopes of revenge set hearts undaunted quivering at each new insult. It was a task as difficult in execution as it was essential to the future of the German cause.

The new governor was fully alive to the importance and the distinction of an office then so conspicuous in the public eye. But he was also sagacious enough to realize that the use of force alone would probably defeat his ends. Monsignor Mercier exercised a powerful influence in Belgium. The Catholic clergy had a strong hold on the masses. Von Bissing, accordingly, conceived a policy wherein the Cardinal and the latter's priests could be used to lead an angry Belgium toward gradual acceptance of the foreign domination. It would, to be sure, prove difficult to adapt a clergy so patriotic to such a purpose. But von Bissing was a shrewd man. He was

personally acquainted with Cardinal von Hartmann, Archbishop of Cologne. It occurred to him that perhaps this eminent prelate, an ardent partisan of Germany, might be the person to bring the Archbishop of Malines to see the desirability of a prudent Germanization of Belgium.

Von Bissing was not mistaken. Von Hartmann consented to "recommend" the new governor to Cardinal Mercier in a letter which depicted von Bissing as an "intelligent, circumspect, just, benevolent" man, who was always anxious to meet churchmen half-way in anything they desired.

The situation which now faced Cardinal Mercier was peculiarly delicate from the contradictions apparent in the duties which events seemed to be laying upon him. On the one hand, he had no intention of serving the enemy's cause even in an indirect way. On the other, Belgian priests, Belgian teachers, Belgian citizens, were languishing, innocent all, in German jails. It was his duty to plead for these; and other cases of distress would surely be requiring his intervention in the course of the war. To be of any effective use he would need the enemy's good-will, von Bissing's in particular.

He went to Brussels and called upon the new governor. Von Bissing received him with the greatest politeness and the very next day returned his call at Malines. There again the governor outdid him-

self in manifestations of friendliness: he was striving to gain an important ally—it was well worth while to promise wonders!

The Cardinal scented the trap out of hand. He thanked von Bissing for his benevolent attitude, but he thought it better to remind him frankly that, though the attitude in question had its advantages for all concerned, it would never persuade the Belgians to overlook the outrage of the occupation and the horrors which had attended it in its beginnings. Such language thwarted the governor's plans for the moment. He took his leave with a politeness effusive but circumspect. But the Cardinal was not the man to let a doubt remain in any mind as to the stand he was going to take regarding the interests of his country. He was careful to confirm in writing, in a formal and detailed letter, the declarations he had made in the course of that rapid conversation. On December 28 he wrote von Bissing:

“My esteem for your Excellency personally, my gratitude for the interest you manifest in the welfare of my country, my desire not to augment, but rather indeed to lighten, the burdens of your office and its incident responsibilities, are absolutely sincere. But I consider it the part of frankness to add that, whatever the personal inclinations of Baron von Bissing may be, he represents among us, as

governor-general, a hostile and a usurping Power, against which we assert our right to independence and to respect of our neutrality. Furthermore, speaking as a representative of the moral and religious interests of Belgium, I protest against the violent acts of injustice of which my fellow-countrymen have been innocent victims."

With this letter Monsignor Mercier enclosed another to Cardinal von Hartmann in which, in a tone of indignation not sparing the German people, he denounced "horrors which remind one of the pagan persecutions of the first three centuries of the Church."

Von Bissing, and his ecclesiastical sponsor, could now know just where they stood: to avoid greater evils still, Cardinal Mercier would use his influence to maintain orderliness in the civil population of Belgium; but never would he lift a finger to persuade acceptance of the German régime. His sovereign was the King of the Belgians; any one else was an enemy in his eyes and would so remain.

Hardly had these personal and private declarations reached von Bissing, than the primate of Belgium restated them, for the benefit of the world at large, in a document that will remain one of his best claims to the admiration of posterity, as it has been to the gratitude of his country. Already on Christmas day, in the year 1914, he had sent to

all the priests of his diocese his famous pastoral on "Patriotism and Endurance."

In this letter, written in the presence of an enemy intoxicated with victory and master of his country, of his city, of his very palace, this bishop of the Church, standing alone and unarmed against regiments of thousands, dared affirm that the first duty of every Belgian citizen was "a duty of gratitude toward the national army" which had resisted the aggressor.

"You cannot doubt it, my brethren," he wrote, "God will save Belgium, or, let us say rather, God is saving Belgium. Breathes there a patriot anywhere who does not feel that our Belgium is a bigger Belgium, that our country has been glorified? That heroism which she, our mother, has been bringing forth in her hour of pain, she is pouring into the blood of every one of her children."

The King, he added, was indeed in refuge on a narrow strip of ground still Belgian, but, in the opinion of the world, he had reached thereon, "the summit of the moral ladder." Reminding his clergy that England had been faithful to her oath, he declared that Germany, on the contrary, had betrayed her plighted word. Before the eyes of the conquerors and sparing no detail, he recounted, city by city, village by village, the list of their destructions and their murders. To a listening Europe, still

doubting, still badly informed, he affirmed, on his sacred word as a bishop, that "hundreds of innocent persons had been shot to death." To the Belgians in his diocese and beyond its boundaries, to Belgians everywhere, he proclaimed that "the authority of the invader is not a legitimate authority," and that "no one owes it, in the bottom of his heart, either respect or fidelity or obedience." Finally, he ordered prayers for the success of the Belgian armies, for the recruits who were drilling for coming battles, for the deliverance of Belgium "in order that, after all the vicissitudes of the battlefields, our country may rise up again, nobler, purer, more glorious than before."

Through channels on which the Cardinal could rely, the letter immediately became public property, not only in Belgium, but in France as well. It aroused, in the latter country, an indescribable emotion. In a message which they signed together, Cardinals Luçon, Andrieu, Amette, Sevin, and De Calèièrès expressed to the primate of Belgium the admiration and the gratitude of their whole nation.

Von Bissing had been discounting Cardinal Mercier as an ally. Now suddenly he found himself confronted with an adversary all the more redoubtable since he could not be directly attacked, protected as he was by the purple and by the still recognized prestige of the Pope. Something nevertheless had

to be done to conjure away the effects of the terrible message. The governor resorted to a stratagem.

He had knowledge of the letter before it was read from the pulpits. He, accordingly, sent to all the priests of the diocese a note, which each one of them was obliged to acknowledge in writing. In it he declared that he, von Bissing, had persuaded the Cardinal to modify the text of the letter, and that, with the consent of the Cardinal, he was requesting all priests to postpone public reading of the document. It happened, however, that, on receiving the note in question, the Dean of Ste. Gudule in Brussels suspected a ruse, and left immediately for Malines to learn from the Cardinal himself just what orders he had issued. Monsignor Mercier thereupon dictated a declaration, with the request that the dean communicate it, by all available means, to the priests whom the Germans were trying to hoodwink:

"Neither verbally nor in writing have I revoked or do I now revoke anything whatsoever in my preceding instructions. I protest against this violent interference with my pastoral functions. Pressure was exerted to induce me to sign a modified form of my letter. I refused to sign. Then an effort was made to cut me off from my clergy by forbidding them to read my letter. I have done my duty. My clergy will understand that it is their turn to do theirs."

The "pressure" and the "effort" alluded to in this rescript relate to another tactic employed by von Bissing against the Cardinal personally, while he was trying, at the same time, to deceive the priests by a false pronouncement.

On the second of January Monsignor Mercier was preparing to officiate at mass in his chapel when he was notified that some German officers were waiting to see him in his antechamber. He went there and found, sure enough, three emissaries of von Bissing. One of them began by complaining of the contents of the pastoral message, and concluded:

"You'll have to appear before the governor-general to answer for that letter."

"Very well; but to-morrow all my time is taken—I must go to Antwerp to officiate at a religious service. Day after to-morrow, Monday, if you desire!"

"No! No! To-day! To-day! We are driving to Brussels at once to get the governor's orders. Then we shall come back here and let you know at what hour you must appear before his Excellency. . . . Has your pastoral already been sent out?"

"Yes, it is already in the hands of the curé in every parish."

The three officers exchanged glances:

"Too late!"

Then, to mask the discomfiture betrayed by this inadvertence, their spokesman again assumed a tone of accusation:

"You must admit that you have disobeyed the regulations as to censorship."

"Whose censorship?"

"Our censorship! Notices have been posted everywhere that nothing was to be printed without the governor's authorization."

"Gentlemen, it is not my habit to go out to the street-corners to read public notices. If your measures were at all important, you might very well have filed proper notification of them with the archbishopric."

The three emissaries withdrew.

The next day, Sunday, and early in the morning, the Cardinal received a telegram from Brussels forbidding him to go to Antwerp for the ceremony at which he was to officiate; and in the evening officers called at his residence to see whether "his Eminence had really been at home all day." On maturer reflection, however, von Bissing abandoned the insulting plan of calling the Cardinal to account. He had, nevertheless, to vent his spleen somehow.

The next day, Monday, he sent a new emissary to Monsignor Mercier with a letter six pages long, written, as a gratuitous act of disrespect, in German characters. The Cardinal asked for time to prepare

a reply, but the messenger refused, on order, to leave the palace until he had the answer in his hands.

The letter sharply rebuked the tone of the archbishop's pastoral, which, the governor said, would tend to excite the populace against "the occupying Power." By way of reprisal, a detachment of soldiers was sent during the night to surround the house of M. Dessain, the printer who had executed the document. M. Dessain was arrested, thrown into prison, and sentenced to a heavy fine.

While these acts of violence were in progress at Malines, military automobiles were scurrying along all the highways in the diocese. Soldiers appeared at the parsonages in the villages, demanding the surrender of all copies of the pastoral at the points of their revolvers. The priests refused to a man; and, in spite of the most frantic efforts on the part of the Germans, the letter was publicly read throughout the diocese.

To get even with the Cardinal, von Bissing forbade him to have any further communication with his bishops. But, when such persecution began to draw protests from all the countries of Europe, von Bissing deemed it necessary to defend himself. In an article inserted in a newspaper, "*La Belgique*," he denied that the personal liberty of the archbishop had been interfered with, and, to cap the climax of effrontery, went so far as to say:

"In view of the Governor-General's opinion as to the probable effect of the pastoral, the Cardinal withdraws his order that the clergy continue publishing the document and distributing it in Catholic homes."

Such assertions required a disclaimer. On January 12, Monsignor Mercier addressed a letter to the members of the clergy:

"Your attention is called to a communication published in the newspapers by the Governor-General of Brussels, in which it is stated that the Cardinal Archbishop of Malines has been in no way interfered with in the free exercise of his ecclesiastical functions. The facts prove that this assertion is contrary to the truth.

"On the evening of January first, and during all the following night, German soldiers forced their way into all parsonages, removed or tried to remove my pastoral from the hands of the priests, and, in contempt of my episcopal authority, ordered you to refrain from reading it to the members of your congregations, threatening severe penalties to be inflicted upon your persons or upon your parishes.

"The personal dignity of your Archbishop was not respected. In fact, on January second before day-break, and specifically at six o'clock, I was ordered to appear that very morning before the Governor-General to account for my letter to the clergy and the people. The following day, I was forbidden to

go to Antwerp to officiate at a Salutation to the Holy Sacrament in that Cathedral. Finally, I was forbidden to make calls, at my own pleasure, upon other bishops in Belgium.

"As a citizen, as a pastor, as a member of the Sacred College of Cardinals, I protest that your rights and mine have been violated."

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This was open warfare, a warfare which the Cardinal waged with indomitable energy, but without ever departing from his customary attitude of patience and charity. The chief weapon of the churchman was in his words, which were now being listened to or read from one end of Christendom to the other. The governor, accordingly, was on the watch for any new pastoral, hoping if possible to catch his antagonist in some act of incitement against his authority. Von Bissing was attributing basely aggressive motives to the Archbishop, whereas the latter was primarily concerned, after this first quarrel had subsided, with keeping the thoughts of his people on their eternal welfare.

The Lenten pastoral of 1915 was little more than a dogmatic treatise on a Christian's devotion to Christ and His divine Mother. It did not stir von Bissing's thunder. The governor continued, nevertheless, to eke out his revenge by sending priests and monks to jail on absurd charges and ignoring

the Cardinal's pleas in their behalf. So things went on for over a year; till on September 26, 1916, in view of approaching Michaelmas, Monsignor Mercier caused to be read in the churches of his diocese a letter in which he invited all Catholics to pray ardently that "the Prince of the Celestial Militia drive Satan, and all other evil spirits abroad in the world, back into Hell."

The Germans did not fail to recognize themselves in the Angels of Darkness alluded to; and the press beyond the Rhine heaped storms of insult upon the name of the Belgian cardinal. Von Bissing thought himself personally attacked; but how get the better of this intrepid prelate who, not satisfied with refusing to bow the knee, was now again on the offensive?

The governor wrote a letter of violent reproof to Monsignor Mercier, and, to emphasize its effect, had it delivered in Malines by one of his service chiefs, Baron von der Lancken, who was ordered to add verbal reinforcement to the text itself.

Baron von der Lancken, who thenceforward played a prominent part in the struggle of the invaders with the Cardinal, was acting as secretary on policy to the governor-general. A clever, well-informed gentleman of rather superior education, he had over his chief the advantage of never losing his temper. He loved to argue, and would talk as

long as any one would listen. He was particularly well grounded in Kant's philosophy.

The baron dutifully set out to demonstrate to the Cardinal that the latter's pastoral contained insinuations prejudicial to the Government of Occupation. Exasperated at length by the man's niceties, the prelate spoke out in terms so clear and unequivocal as to admit of no reply:

"Monsieur le Baron," said he, "any excitation on the part of the Belgium populace against you exists only in your imagination. The signs of effervescence which you think you perceive are only the manœuvres of your spies and the hullabaloes of your inquisitors. The Belgian people is patient. It can wait for its revenge. . . . But, let me make one thing clear, Monsieur le Baron: you have not won the heart of Belgium. The heart of Belgium you will never win. I am trying to speak frankly. Pray do not take offense at the apparent harshness of my language. The Belgians are doing you no harm. They will not do you any harm. But in their hearts they hate your government. There you have the truth. I state it because, after more than a year of experience, you seem not yet to have grasped it! . . ."

Von der Lancken made the point that the Government of Occupation alone had the right to command and to exact obedience. Thinking he might catch the archbishop napping, he asked one day what the

Belgians would do if they were confronted by contradictory orders, the ones emanating from their own government, others from the occupying power.

"What they would do!" exclaimed the Cardinal. "Between a power without authority and an authority without power, how could they hesitate? Legitimate authority would always have their preference. They would place Law above Fact. Fact is not Law."

Von Bissing had complained that the prelate's attitude toward him was not consistent with the frequent favors he kept asking of the Government of Occupation. Monsignor Mercier decided to make matters clear once for all, and, addressing von der Lancken, he said:

"Monsieur le Baron, I am going to surprise you, and, I fear, hurt your feelings."

"Oh, no! Do speak your mind, Monseigneur!"

"Well, I must tell you baldly, and I beg you to repeat it to the governor: on the score you mention, I feel no gratitude whatsoever to you, because I owe you none!"

"That, now, Monseigneur . . . !"

"Be patient, I beg of you! May I make myself wholly clear? For one concession which you are kind enough to make me personally I am properly thankful: I refer to the permission I have to use an automobile. But as for the petitions I address to the

governor (rather frequently, I admit), I have met only with refusals. I have grown accustomed to reading at the beginning of every reply, 'I regret to inform your Eminence. . . .'

Unbending haughtiness, perhaps, but a haughtiness fraught with supreme courtesy, dignity, religious poise—such the tone of Monsignor Mercier's dealings with the oppressors of his country. His initiatives had in all cases an essentially pastoral character. He was careful not to presume any political leadership, any political rôle, whether in administration or in agitation. He was a father with one purpose in mind: to counsel, succor, protect, his children.

Once free from official annoyances, the Cardinal went back to the comparatively peaceful task of encouraging his downtrodden people. In a pastoral published on All Saints' Day in the year 1915, he commented on the Beatitudes of the Gospels as suitable subjects of meditation for bereaved mothers and destitute widows.

"Oh," he wrote, "I seem to hear a voice of protest rising from among you. 'Impossible!' it laments, 'impossible that happiness should be found in privations and in tears!' Impossible, my brethren? Try it for yourselves! Our Lord deceives no one. When He proclaims the conditions of happiness, it is an

article of faith that he who fulfils them cannot be other than happy.

“Of course, we do not mean that superficial satisfaction which a bewildered head, or frivolous heart, may temporarily find in a pleasure. We mean that deeper happiness of the soul, that perfect peace, which is far greater than all ephemeral enjoyment, that calm possession of ourselves which is ruffled neither by surface storms nor worldly tempests—we mean that happiness which the Gospels and the Church call eternal repose.”

And such promises and such hopes from the good shepherd were a source of comfort to his flock in the midst of most cruel adversity.

Nevertheless, with his eyes thus fixed on matters of the soul, he never lost sight of his country's honor. To justify in the eyes of Europe measures to which they had resorted at the beginning of the war, the Germans had alleged, and even denounced before the Pope, violations of the rules of warfare on the part of a pretended corps of Belgian snipers, who were said to have inflicted heavy damage upon the German army and made reprisals necessary. To give legal form to this defense, the government at Berlin instituted an inquiry to be conducted by its agents alone, and their findings were later to be published in a memorandum entitled “The White Book.”

Monsignor Mercier set out to unmask this ma-

nœuver. So far as an inquiry was concerned, Belgium did not fear one. She asked only that it be bilateral. The Prussian Government was planning to be both prosecutor and judge! Monsignor Mercier suggested that the investigation be conducted by bishops of the Germanic countries, acting in concert with bishops of Belgium. He wrote to the cardinals of Germany, Bavaria, and Austria-Hungary in that sense.

"We ask you," he said, "to help us in conducting an inquiry that will hear both sides, you designating as many representatives as you may choose to appoint—we the same number—three, let us say. And we all then, in joint agreement, will invite the bishops of a neutral state to appoint one of their number as a superarbiter to preside over the deliberations of the tribunal.

"You have laid your indictments before the head of the Church. It is not just that he should hear only your side."

No reply ever came from the dignitaries of the German Church. Nevertheless, Benedict XV suspected that Belgium was the scene of sufferings which might require his consolation and relief. Under pretext of asking advice as to a reorganization of the Congregation of Studies, he summoned Cardinal Mercier to Rome.

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Would von Bissing fall in with this trip, which

might result in embarrassing his country's propaganda abroad? He was fully aware of the danger. On the other hand, what a relief if this archbishop of indomitable patriotism who held the ear and the hearts of all Belgium could be got off the governor-general's mind until the end of the war! Intrigues, engineered in part, it is said, by the Archbishop of Cologne, were started to persuade Benedict XV to find some post for Cardinal Mercier in Rome. The Pope, however, divined what was going on, and the scheme fell through. In fact, after a most affectionate greeting to the Archbishop of Malines, Benedict made the famous remark:

"His cause is our cause."

The Cardinal's progress through the Italian cities was a triumphal march, and he did not miss an opportunity in the course of his journey to whet the pride and fortify the morale of the Belgian people. During his stay in Rome, a group of Belgian military chaplains and officers on leave came to pay their respects to him. In his reply he drew a picture of the things he had witnessed; then, throwing reserve to the winds, he exclaimed:

"No, I shall never bend my bishop's head before those Germans, I shall never humble my pride as a Belgian! I refuse! I refuse!"

And he drew himself up to his full height as he spoke the words, his lips trembling, his fiery eyes

gazing into space as in solemn vow. In the exhortation with which he concluded, he enjoined courage upon these soldiers of his country as a military chieftain might have done. They left his presence enraptured.

On his return from Italy, Monsignor Mercier wrote in a Lenten message:

"A conviction, natural and supernatural, that our ultimate victory is certain, is implanted more firmly than ever in my heart. . . . We shall win, have no doubt of that, but we are not yet at the end of our sufferings. . . . The future is not doubtful for us, but its nature depends upon us!"

Such prophecies filled the governor-general with rage. Unable, however, to attack the Cardinal directly, he sought revenge by intensifying his persecution of priests and monks. The masters of the principal ecclesiastical seminaries and numbers of influential curés were arrested, brought to trial without Belgian counsel, and sentenced to deportation or to long terms of solitary confinement. In dealing with such outrages, the archbishop had to swallow his patriotic pride and assume momentarily the rôle of a solicitor before the torturers of his country, emphasizing to von Bissing or to von der Lancken the unfairness of their procedure, and pleading for ameliorations in the treatment of the victims.

On July 21, 1916, the anniversary of Belgian in-

dependence, he returned, however, to his defiant tone. Notwithstanding the decree against public gatherings or demonstrations, the archbishop summoned the principal representatives of the Belgian aristocracy and all Catholic citizens to a commemoration of the day in the Cathedral of Ste. Gudule (Brussels). The great church was filled to overflowing with a throng eager to gaze upon the majesty of the Cardinal's purple and to sense the rapture of his comforting words.

Looking ahead to a date, then not so far distant, the centenary of Belgian independence, and fascinated by the vision of a glorious future that was to come to the country, he said:

"Just fourteen years from this same day, our ruined cathedrals restored, our desecrated churches rebuilt, will all be opening their portals to receive eager throngs. Albert our King, standing once more upon his throne, our Queen and our royal princes about him, will once more bow his indomitable brow, but this time of his own free will, before the majesty of the King of kings. Again from the Yser to the Meuse, from La Panne to Arlon, we shall be hearing the joyous pealing of our bells, and, standing hand in hand under the vaulted ceiling of this House of God, we Belgians will renew our oaths to our Lord, to our sovereign, to our liberties, while our bishops and our priests, interpreting the soul of the

nation, will lift their voices in a common impulse of joyous thanksgiving to sing the *Te Deum* of our triumph. But the first centenary of our independence must find us stronger, braver, more united than ever before. Let us prepare for that day in work, in patience, in brotherly love of one another. When, in the year 1930, we shall look back upon these dark years just past, they will seem to us the most luminous, the most majestic, and—provided we can find the will and the endurance in ourselves—the most fortunate and most fruitful of our country's history. *Per crucem ad lucem*: in sacrifice the well-spring of light."

Participation in this demonstration cost the population of Brussels a fine of a million marks. Von Bissing was furious, and increasingly bitter recriminations kept the Cardinal informed as to the governor's state of mind. Each document issued at the Cardinal's palace meant a visit from von der Lancken at Malines, the baron, for his part, apparently enjoying these spirited cavilings over words and phrases in the circulars and charges of the archbishopric. But these were merely pin-pricks. The governor had other things up his sleeve, among them a blow which would strike the Cardinal to the heart and leave an incurable wound behind it.

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In the month of October, 1916, it suddenly struck

von Bissing that the number of workmen out of jobs was increasing in Belgium. The factories in the country had been pillaged and their machinery transported to Germany. It was inevitable that the output of Belgian wage-earners should diminish, and that numbers of them should become public charges dependent on the International Relief Committee for subsistence. Meantime there was plenty of work in Germany. Von Bissing pretended grave concern for the maintenance of order in Belgium, and ostensibly in the best interests of the unemployed he pointed out that they could find elsewhere the bread which their own country was refusing them. In reality, he knew that every Belgian laborer deported to Germany would release one German laborer for service at the front. This scheme of reinforcing the German army seems to have come originally from von Hindenburg, who found in von Bissing merely a faithful executor of the plan. At any rate the Deportation Policy was devised as an indirect contribution to a German victory. A decree was published whereby without previous notice, merely upon the calling of their names, young men could be suddenly snatched from their families, loaded by main force on trains with steam up, and despatched in groups toward the frontier with destinations unknown. This, in substance, was a reversion to ancient slavery, but with a cynicism and a brutality that the pagan na-

tions of old did not always practise. The moment Cardinal Mercier got wind of the plan, he wrote to the governor reminding him that his two predecessors, von Huene and von der Goltz, had both formally promised him that never would young men be taken to Germany from the occupied territory and set to involuntary labor.

Von Bissing could not help seeking an excuse for his nation's bad faith. In replying to the archbishop he was ironical enough to cite the need of relieving Belgium's budgets for charity and of saving the workers from "an idleness which would be injurious to their technical availability."

To which Monsignor Mercier retorted haughtily:

"Do not talk to us, I pray you, of the need of lightening the burdens of public charity. Spare us that bitter irony. . . . Our unemployed are not supported by the charity of your government; it is not from your treasury that succor comes to them. . . .

"No, the Belgian is not a lazy man. Belgian labor has developed a religion of labor. In the noble struggles of economic life, the Belgian worker has proved his qualities. If he has scorned the high wages the Occupying Government has been offering him, he has done so through a sense of patriotic self-respect. We, the pastor of our people, we who have been brought closer than ever to their sorrows and their

distresses, know what it has cost the Belgian workman to prefer privation in independence to comfort in subjection. Do not cast slurs upon him. He is entitled to your courtesy."

Whether from personal vindictiveness or in obedience to orders, von Bissing did not recede from his position. Indeed, a measure of unforeseen severity came to aggravate his first decrees. Town governments had been directed by the German authorities themselves to indicate the individuals out of employment whose removal would be least prejudicial to local interests; but, with admirable spirit, they refused to give up their countrymen. The governor thereupon proclaimed that successively, in an order arbitrarily established by his officials, all able-bodied males seventeen years old or over would be seized. This time the Cardinal appealed to all his fellow bishops in Belgium to join him in a cry of horror which would reach wherever a human heart might beat.

First he depicted the cruel scenes of separation:

"Squads of soldiers are forcing their way into peaceful homes, tearing young men from their parents, husbands from wives, fathers from children. Bayonets block the doors through which the wives and mothers would rush to bid their loved ones farewell. The captives, lined up in groups of forty or fifty, are then herded into freight-cars, and, the

moment a train is full, a higher officer gives the signal for departure. Off they go! Another thousand of Belgians led into slavery, condemned without trial to the severest penalty known to the criminal code next after death—to deportation! They know neither where they are going nor for how long. All that they know is that their labor will be of profit only to the enemy.”

Then he appealed to the conscience of humanity, flouted and defied:

“We, the shepherds of these flocks which brute force is tearing from us, appalled by the moral and religious isolation in which they will be languishing, helpless witnesses of the grief and terror in so many homes that are being broken or threatened, we, the bishops of Belgium, appeal to all men, whether Christian or non-Christian, whether in allied nations, in neutral nations, or even in the enemy nations, who respect the dignity of human beings. May Divine Providence deign to inspire all who have authority, all who have a voice, all who have pens, to rally around the humble flag of Belgium for the abolition of slavery in Europe.”

This appeal remained, alas, without effect. As a refinement of cruelty, indeed, Belgian priests who were asking permission to go into exile so as to minister to their unfortunate compatriots, were forbidden to cross the frontier.

Cardinal Mercier would not admit defeat, however. He organized a committee of former cabinet ministers, senators and deputies, magistrates, and high treasury officials to sign an address to the Emperor of Germany, which, "with a frankness befitting a free people, would draw the attention of that sovereign," to the crying abuses of the deportations and the urgent need of affording prompt relief to the sufferings of Belgium.

The Kaiser, this time, perceived the folly of further provoking the indignation of the world. The trains of bondage ceased creeping along the railways toward the frontier. A few at a time, even, the unfortunates who had survived the privations and the torments of the German cantonments were enabled to return home. But in what a plight most of them—pale, emaciated, their constitutions undermined by fevers and tuberculosis, destined to undergo long periods of treatment in the hospitals before they could be restored to their families!

Meantime the occupation was dragging on, the tribulations crowding thick and fast upon defenseless Belgium. The Cardinal's problem was now to anticipate falterings, encourage hopefulness, see to it that the nation should hold out to the end, whatever the cost. In a letter entitled "Courage, my brethren!" (February 11, 1917) he once more extolled the moral grandeur of the nation and paid

tribute to the heroic endurance of the deportees who had just reappeared among their people:

"We saw these valiant men at the time of their departure," he writes, "bearing up in order to hearten their comrades or, with effort supreme, intoning the national anthem. We saw them, as they came back, sick, suffering, human wrecks of skin and bone. And as we looked through our tears into their vacant eyes we bowed humbly before them, for they unwittingly were revealing to us a new and unsuspected aspect of our national heroism. As the years go by, we shall have one memory to gaze upon for the inspiration of generations still unborn: the spectacle of a people of seven million souls, who not only refused, with one accord, on the second of August, to allow their honor to be called in question, but who also, for more than thirty months of increasing physical and moral hardships, on battle-fields or in military and civil prisons, in exile or at home under an iron yoke, remained imperturbably masters of themselves, and never once thought of crying 'This is too much! We have had enough!'"

To hold his people at such "spiritual altitude," the Cardinal had to count on the coöperation of his priests. So he urged them, in particular, to practise "the pastoral virtues of the present hour"—gentleness, fortitude, serenity, and, above all, charity.

The determined mood that Belgium continued to

preserve in the presence of her conquerors must have been highly exasperating to the governor, who saw himself disappointed in his shrewdest calculations. At any rate, Monsignor Mercier again had to defend himself before Baron von der Lancken for the language used in this letter of February 11. But, as the event proved, von Bissing's days were numbered. His weak constitution broke down under the duties of an office really beyond his strength. He died on the eighteenth of April, 1917. On receiving the news Cardinal Mercier wrote:

"Baron von Bissing was a Christian. He said to me one day, I remember, in a tone that placed his sincerity beyond all doubt: 'I am not a Catholic, but I believe in Christ.' To the Christ, therefore, I shall pray, and very sincerely, for the repose of his soul."

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In despair of winning Monsignor Mercier as an ally, von Bissing had long since taken position as an open adversary of the Cardinal's policies and influence; but he had, as a rule, remained a polite adversary. His successor, Baron von Falkenhausen, was at no pains to mask his Teutonic brusqueness under pretenses of courtesy and consideration. Under his rule a measure long contemplated by the Germans—the separation of Flanders from the Walloon district—was almost put into execution.

Such a step would have been tantamount to dismemberment of the Belgium for which the Cardinal had toiled and suffered, and he opposed the project with all his might, even, at one moment, appealing to the Pope to exert moral influence in support of his demands. Though he could not bring the Germans to abandon their policy altogether, he at least succeeded in having the *status quo* respected.

To save himself in advance from the Cardinal's interference, von Falkenhausen gave him to understand that he would consent to discuss with him only matters bearing strictly on religion; though this definition of his position did not make him any the readier to discuss the arbitrary imprisonment of dignitaries of the Church in the Cardinal's diocese. Fortunately von der Lancken remained the intermediary between the two powers. If the man's mania for endless argument often wearied the Cardinal, he was, nevertheless, easy to get along with, and Monsignor Mercier could speak his mind freely to him. In dire straits toward the end of the occupation, Germany thought of requisitioning such raw material as could be found in Belgian churches—copper vessels, the metal in organs and bells, even the wool in hospital mattresses. It was through Baron von der Lancken that Cardinal Mercier succeeded in obtaining mitigations of these odious measures.

Regardless of his treatment at the hands of the German authorities, the Cardinal treated individual Germans with a charity that at times attained a most exquisite delicacy.

One day he was traversing his cathedral, dressed as a simple priest and attended by one of his associates, when his eyes fell on a young lieutenant of the army of occupation who was standing in admiration before the beautiful canvas by Rubens that adorns one of the altars. Turning to his companion he asked what he thought the age of the young man might be. The question was in Latin. To the Cardinal's surprise, the young officer answered;

"Diem natalem vicesimam hodie Mechliniæ habeo. (I am celebrating my twentieth birthday here in Malines to-day.)"

The prelate smiled, wished the young lieutenant many happy recurrences of the day and invited him to come and share his dinner. At table he questioned the boy regarding his family and his schooling and finally asked what he thought of life in the trenches:

"Ego dormio, et cor meum vigilat," the young man replied. "I sleep—it is my heart that keeps awake."

Tears glistened in the eyes of the old Archbishop. When the youth took leave to go back to

his post, Monsignor Mercier gave him his blessing, though he was not a Catholic:

"My blessing, not as from an archbishop of the Church, but as from an old man, who always tried to do his duty, and is eager to encourage a young man who is going out to do his. Go, under God's care, and may He protect you!"

Just as the lieutenant was climbing into the train which was to carry him back to the trenches, an ecclesiast appeared and gave him a package containing fruit, some dainties, and a book—the "*Carmina Horatii*." On a marked page, the prelate had underlined four verses:

*Virtus, recludens immeritis mori
Cœlum, negata tentat iter via,
Cœtusque vulgares et udam
Spernit humum fugiente penna.*

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Meanwhile the prisons in Germany were packed with priests and monks who were undergoing the harshest discipline, usually for having aided young men to escape to the Belgian army. Upon the civil population privations of all sorts were weighing more cruelly than ever. Once more the Cardinal strove to hearten his people by a pastoral in which he pointed out that sorrow patiently endured brings one closer to God: that God, whether we like it or

not, reveals Himself master through events which come to pass beyond all human calculation and endeavor: finally, that God crowns torture and death with resurrection.

At last the campaign by General Foch opened and the Germans began retreating uninterruptedly in all eastern France. From that moment things moved rapidly. As early as October 1, the occupiers of Belgium realized that they were lost. It would now be to their interest to heap attentions upon the great Cardinal, whose influence might count in making their withdrawal easier. The cathedral at Malines still bore traces of bombardment and of a fire which the enemy had set in an effort to destroy it. The governor now sent an emissary to Monsignor Mercier with an offer of pecuniary compensation for the damage. But the Archbishop drew himself up proudly:

"We shall soon be asking for an accounting; meantime, we shall accept no alms from the Germans."

On the seventeenth of October, von der Lancken called again. He desired to negotiate in advance certain arrangements relative to the peace that was obviously near at hand.

The Archbishop had always received the baron standing, each of them remaining at respective ends

of a small audience-room. On this occasion he invited his visitor to sit down.

"Hitherto," he said, "I have been unable to overlook the fact that you were an enemy. To-day you are my guest: I receive you according to the laws of Belgian hospitality."

On departing the baron left in the Cardinal's hands a memorandum couched in the following terms:

"In our eyes you are the living impersonation of a people which reveres you as its pastor and heeds you as its counselor. It is to you, therefore, that the governor-general and my government have directed me to report that, on our evacuation of your territory, we surrender to you, spontaneously and of our own free will, all Belgians who have been imprisoned or deported for resistance to our authority. They will be at liberty to return to their homes, some of them as early as next Monday, the twenty-first current. Since this announcement will, I am sure, bring joy to your heart, I esteem it a personal privilege to deliver it to you, all the more since I have not been able to live for four years among the Belgians without learning to esteem them and to appreciate their patriotism at its just worth."

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On November 11, Germany's defeat was consum-

mated. Cardinal Mercier could not fail to celebrate in all magnificence an event which he had foreseen and prophesied with such trusting assurance. A circular brief carried his pæan of deliverance to every nook in Belgium:

"After four years of arrogance, injustice, cruelty, perfidy, they lie prostrate! On Monday, the eleventh of November, at three o'clock in the afternoon, the bells of the city of Malines all broke forth in joy to chime their hymn of victory. On Monday, the eleventh of November, at three o'clock in the afternoon, the flag of our country unfurled above the tower of Saint-Rombaut, opening out its folds toward Termonde and Gand, beckoning back into our midst again our King and his soldiers. Information has come to hand that on Tuesday next, the nineteenth of November, 1918, Albert the Magnanimous will return as conqueror to his capital. The triumph of justice is complete. The conscience of mankind is vindicated.

"Glory be to God, beloved brethren! Glory be to His justice! May the people of Belgium, may the victors, may the vanquished, be mindful of it forever!"

Obediently, no doubt, the Belgian nation hearkened to the voice of its pastor at that moment. But while showing proper deference to God's justice,

in their hearts they felt an imperious need to vow imperishable gratitude to the man who had made possible its reign on earth at the cost of untold effort, disappointment, and sacrifice.

CHAPTER IX

A WORLD'S IDOL

WHILE King Albert I, at the climactic moment of his reëntry into Brussels, was publicly thanking Cardinal Mercier for his support of the throne and for his inestimable services to Belgium, and while the country was outdoing itself in admiration of the great churchman who had been its savior, the Cardinal's one desire was that the homage which was being paid to him should be turned to One higher than he. God, he declared, at the behest of Mary, mediatrix of all Grace, had delivered Belgium! And he held to this point till a national offering to the Sacred Heart of Jesus had been decreed by the government. The Cardinal himself laid the corner-stone of the votive temple on the plateau of Keokelberg, the twenty-ninth of June, 1919. His thought was that the temple should commemorate both the victory of the Belgians and the centenary of their independence. The ceremonies took place in the presence of all the Belgian bishops and an assembly of a hundred thousand people. Those who heard him that day in vibrant voice glorifying the

Soldier-King of the Yser for the victory, thanking the gracious Queen for her devotion to the welfare of humble soldiers, or offering the homage of victorious Belgium to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, could gain some conception of the superhuman influence his eloquence exerted on a throng.

Other nations besides Belgium, however, were eager to show their affection for the Cardinal. France awarded him a seat in her Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, and invited him to Paris to receive an appropriate tribute in person. Meantime M. Poincaré, the President, hurried to Belgium to pay his respects to the great bishop in the mutilated cathedral at Malines.

"In barbaric times," said the French executive on that occasion, "the bishops of the Church were the defenders of their cities. That you have been in our times. Speaking from the eminence of your cathedra, you expressed the thoughts of oppressed Belgium in imperishable phrases. You did more than that: you spoke in the name of Justice itself, and your words resounded throughout the civilized world."

Numberless messages of gratitude and admiration poured in from the countries across the seas. The peoples of the United States and Canada were eager to look upon the face of this aged man, whose quiet voice had held the most formidable military

power in the world at bay for four years. And he consented to give those allies of his country his supreme testimonial of Belgian friendship. Accompanied by Monsignor Deploige and Canon Vrancken, he sailed for America in September, 1919. At first he was puzzled at finding himself the object of so many personal ovations and tried to avoid at least such demonstrations as he deemed excessive. Afterwards he judged it more fitting to state, on each occasion, just what acts of his own or on the part of his clergy might in some degree seem entitled to the esteem of foreigners. To have done his plain duty was his sole merit in his own eyes. If people insisted on praising him for that, very well! In a speech delivered at Philadelphia, he said:

“I am beginning to understand the affectionate attentions you are showering upon me. You Americans conceive of a pastor, not as a man who withdraws from the world to groan in solitary prayer, but as a man who inspires and supports his people. Well, each of us has a post assigned him in this world, and at that post his duty lies. When I tried to protect my parishioners from invasion, when I kept their moral obligations before their eyes, when I visited our cities and towns to organize measures of relief, when my clergy joined the ranks as chaplains or as members of the Red Cross, when my priests took upon themselves the support of fatherless chil-

dren, what were we doing but our duty? But you Americans are in the habit of doing your duty. That must be why you appreciated our efforts and applauded us. . . ."

The quality that most impressed the Cardinal during his weeks in the United States was the instinct for liberty that he seemed to find in all Americans.

Late in October he paid rapid visits to the principal cities of Canada. Everywhere, at Toronto, at Montreal, at Ottawa, at Quebec, bishops, magistrates, citizens of all classes and all faiths, crowded about him to acclaim him as one of the saviors of civilization. What most touched the former professor of Louvain, both in Canada and the United States, was the homage paid him by the universities in numberless honorary degrees.

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A pressing call from Paris was awaiting him at the end of his return voyage—the formal admission to the Institute, which circumstances had so long postponed. As at Philadelphia, but this time at greater length, the Cardinal dwelt upon the case of Belgium as an example of passionate attachment to duty. Then he went on to pay a magnificent tribute to France, the sister-in-arms of his country:

"Let us hold our hearts aloft, a preceding speaker has commanded us. Let us learn to await serenely

the complete unfolding of the plans of Him who bids us have faith in the wisdom of His guidance! If to-day, gentlemen, I venture to utter words of such austerity in the presence of men like you, it is because those words are but an abstract summary of things that your France has actually done. Other nations have been having their hours of glory and brilliant achievement; but in France all of you, citizens and rulers alike, marshals and simple soldiers in the armies of land and the armies of sea, the clergy of all ranks, the lay population of all parties, never faltering for an instant, whether in retreat or on the advance, whether in adversity or in triumph, toiled unflinching at your arduous task, your hearts steadfast upon glory. These four years of war have been one continuous act of heroism on the part of the people of France. Among all the nations of the globe, the nation that is the most attractive and the most beautiful, the nation that is greatest in the influence of its thinking, in the precision and charm of its language, in the smiling bravery of its soldiers, in the chivalry of its manners, in the enthusiasm of its apostleship, in the fruitfulness of its Christian endeavor, is beyond doubt your nation, France!"

In their response the members of the Institute rose to equal heights of generosity and courtesy.

M. Imbart de la Tour, of the Committee for the Restoration of the Library of Louvain, asked his fellow-academicians to join in that enterprise, and M. Émile Boutroux, in an inspired impromptu, lauded the prelate who had "forced brute violence to its knees." The next day, all Catholic Paris flocked to Notre-Dame to hear the Cardinal, whose tall, lank figure never seemed taller and more majestic than in the pulpit once occupied by Lacordaire. The French capital, meantime, had taken up the epithet bestowed on him by M. Charles Maurras in the "Action Française": "Le grand Juste!"

Such testimonials coming to him from all corners of the earth left Monsignor Mercier the simple soul he had always been, or, if anything, humbler than before. His one thought now was to be back as soon as possible in his diocese. But, as the event proved, he was hardly freer in Malines than he had been in Paris or in Montreal from the pursuit of admiring foreigners. If he lent himself to this apparently endless homage, it was not, certainly, out of any human vanity. He knew that after all those years of war, numberless families were nursing still bleeding wounds. The visits he received not infrequently afforded him opportunity to dispense the consolations of his religion far and wide. One evening, at a very late hour, after a day crowded with

important audiences, he granted one last interview to some newspaper men. They were to learn the secret of his patience from his own lips.

"Yes, I do feel tired after all these visits; yet, St. Paul teaches us that it is as much our duty to rejoice with those who rejoice as it is to weep with those who weep."

The Cardinal had for a long time been acquainted with a distinguished French writer, Victor Giraud, whom he had been encouraging in a plan for writing a "History of the Great War." The work was now finished and a copy of it came into the Cardinal's hands. On one of the pages he must have read the following lines about himself:

"The Archbishop of Malines faced Germany coolly, resolutely, audaciously, demanding from her his full right, especially the right to do his full duty; he spoke, he wrote, protecting, organizing, consoling. Over four years' time, this tall, lean prelate, with the pale, ascetic countenance, the deep burning eyes—the grandest figure in the Catholic world of our day—may be said, along with King Albert, to have personified the very soul of sturdy little Belgium."

The portrait was true enough to life; but the prelate found it too flattering and penned this friendly remonstrance to the author:

"As for your page 269, I think I can forgive you

for it, since I know that your intentions were of the kindest; but I must tell you that, as I read it, my guardian angel was constrained to whisper a prayer in my ear: 'O Lord, lead us not into temptation!' "

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But there was work to be done, after the first hour of exultance was over. As was the case with the rest of Belgium, great stretches of the diocese of Malines lay in ruins. The prelate furnished a slogan for the work of restoration in his pastoral of the year 1920 called "Let us rebuild." This was followed the next year by another designed to forestall any faltering in the costly task: "What are we doing?"

Other nations, as well as Belgium, had been victims of the war and the Belgian Cardinal was the spokesman to whom all supplicants turned. In 1919, he raised his voice in behalf of the orphans of all countries; in 1920, for the refugees of Poland; and in 1921, for destitute Russians and famine-stricken China; for the Russians again in 1922, and in 1923 for the victims of the Japanese earthquake. All his appeals, whether in the form of circulars or of charges, were read religiously, sometimes avidly; because his clear, vigorous, incisive language, often singularly forceful or picturesque, and always far removed from the old-fashioned ecclesiastical

grandiloquence, laid hold upon his readers directly, went straight to the heart.

With the coming of peace the struggles of the old political parties were only waiting for an excuse to burst forth anew, and doctrinal questions shortly forced themselves imperiously upon the Cardinal's attention. During the war Monsignor Mercier had extolled the papacy, defending it against the attacks directed, whenever events furnished a pretext, now upon Pius X and now upon Benedict XV. At this moment he considered it extremely important to create an atmosphere of friendly coöperation in Belgium, and he decided to remind his countrymen of the social teachings propounded by the Popes. In 1923, he published his letter on "The Papacy and Christian Socialism in the light of the encyclical '*Ubi arcano Dei.*'"

Monsignor Mercier was a syndicalist; that is to say, he saw in the syndicate, in the corporation, in laws regulating housing and alcohol, in institutions of education and recreation for the masses, the best preventives of class conflicts. Though opposed to certain demands of the labor parties, he neither condemned these as a whole nor dismissed them without distinction.

"If Socialism," said he, "had no other objective than to organize the property of this or that social group on a collective basis, there would be no seri-

ous objection to it, provided, of course, it did not pretend to make its system universal, provided it were willing to practise collective ownership for itself, allowing private property to exist elsewhere. Have not the most perfect of our Catholic societies, those under the patronage of St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Dominick, St. Ignatius de Loyola, and St. Francis de Sales, realized the communistic dream—each individual working according to his powers and each receiving according to his needs?

"I hold that wage-earners who earn an honest living by their toil are entitled to as much respect as writers, magistrates, army officers, deputies, senators, priests, bishops, as any one, in short, in the so-called 'category of intellectuals.' To both groups I extend a friendly hand and, if I were to make any distinction between them, my preference would go to the one who grasped my hand, not as an act of mere politeness, but in an impulse of spontaneous and generous friendship."

These words of conciliation were especially opportune in Belgium in the year 1923. Not only might the class conflict there as elsewhere have taken a desperately bitter turn; but the country had been torn since the days of von Bissing by an antagonism of races and of provinces which threatened to develop into civil war.

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The efforts of the Germans to foment separatist tendencies in the Flemish provinces had met with some success, and the vague antipathy which stirred Fleming against Walloon had been greatly aggravated since the conclusion of peace. The clergy itself, in some of the northern districts, was fostering the Flemish movement. As chief of a diocese which embraced the Belgian capital with a large territory predominantly French in language, and the cities of Antwerp and Malines distinctly Flemish in language and feeling, Monsignor Mercier did not find it easy to maintain harmony even in his own flock. Despite his eminent services during the war, some of his parishioners went so far as to say that the diocese should have a cardinal of Flemish birth. Hurt by this petty captiousness on the part of some of his children and to avert quarrels of which he was able better than any one else to appreciate the dangers, he addressed himself more trustfully than ever to the "Mother of God, mediatrix of all Grace."

Constant and tender devotion to the Virgin had always been part of his religion. His dream was now to add another jewel to her celestial crown. In the year 1921, a Marial Synod met at his call in Brussels, and studied the rôle of the Virgin Mary as the mediary between this world and her divine Son. The Cardinal's purpose here, with the support of all the bishops of Belgium and of numerous foreign

prelates, as well as of the authorities on doctrine at the University of Louvain, was to define a dogma of "Mary the intercessor" and formulate it for acceptance by the Church. Monsignor Mercier was not to live to see this hope realized; but he had the joy, that same year, of obtaining from the Pope, as a special honor to the diocese of Malines, the right to perform the mass and the office of the Very Holy Virgin, to be worshiped under the title he proposed.

Merely as a bishop, Monsignor Mercier was hardly equal to the multitudinous tasks imposed upon him; yet the former professor, the philosopher, the man of letters, could not always evade pressing invitations to enrich this or that academic conference with the precious contribution of his own learning. Happening to be in Rome in December of the year 1920, he consented to deliver an address at the celebration of the fifteenth centenary of the death of St. Jerome (on the 19th of that month), sketching the moral physiognomy of that saintly teacher and showing himself as judicious as a historian as he was penetrating as a psychologist. On June sixth of the following year, he spoke on "The Poetic Genius of Dante," before the Royal Academy of Belgium. Here was a vast and complicated subject; but, long before that, Professor Mercier had grasped the lofty theological foundations

of the "Divine Comedy" and he was now able to present a most happy elucidation of the philosophical sources of Dante's art.

These diversions were but interludes in difficult administrative labors. The years were going by without bringing Belgium the prosperity and tranquillity she had expected from her victory. Here and there complaints were rising against a situation which continued distressing, without a corresponding spirit of economy in the people or a zeal for production at all calculated to heal the nation's troubles. In February, 1924, the Cardinal accordingly published a boldly critical yet cheering letter on "Our Disappointments after the War—faith all the same!" Here again as always he was the leader of indefatigable determination! He had defended Belgium against Germany. He would be just as stubborn in defending her against herself!

Not that, with all these local cares and preoccupations, the Cardinal's figure had shrunk to the proportion of his diocese. His glory was literally now filling the world. Heads of governments, generals, diplomats, authors of all nations and all languages, inevitably found their way to Belgium as on pilgrimages, to the palace in Malines, where they could find the priest who had done more honor to humanity than any prelate in centuries. The Cardinal's secretary lost all count of the decorations of

one kind or another that came in from the most varied sources—grand cordons, foreign knight-hoods, honorary degrees, honorary citizenships, freedoms of cities. Cardinal Mercier was no longer the soul of Belgium merely: he was becoming a symbol of humanity at large in its loftiest, noblest, most resplendent qualities.

As springtime of the year 1924 came on, the Cardinal's priests and parishioners remembered that he had been ordained just fifty years before. Time indeed was doing its relentless work with him: the prelate's tall figure was stooping unmistakably now, and the hair crowning his stately forehead was turning frankly white. It was a special joy and pride for Belgium, however, that the proposal of a jubilee was put forward not from Brussels but from Rome. The moment Pius XI heard of the anniversary, he despatched a brief to Monsignor Mercier, rehearsing the various phases of his career in superlatives very rare on the lips of the pontiffs.

"Obeying a spontaneous prompting of our heart," Pius wrote, "we have desired (permit us to say as much) to take the lead in all the joyous demonstrations of which you are shortly to be the recipient; for not in glorious Belgium alone, but in other nations also, we may be sure, admirers will rise in throngs to do homage to your great virtues."

In fact when King Albert published a message

to Cardinal Mercier, once more expressing his admiration and regard for the illustrious prelate, "a model of the highest virtues of his calling and the impersonation of our national honor," the heads of the principal Catholic nations, the marshals of the World War—Foch, de Castelnau, Fayolle, Gouraud—ambassadors, ministers, academies, all began sending their best wishes and congratulations to the great pastor.

On May 12, 1924, the day of the religious ceremony, the Cathedral of Saint-Rombaut gathered the most representative citizens of Belgium into its vast nave to do honor to the fearless apostle and to the "savior of his country." What a contrast between the mass he had conducted fifty years before on the modest altar of Braine-l'Alleud in the presence of a humble congregation of neighbors, and the august ceremony of that anniversary day, when the Cardinal, clothed in his sumptuous purple with a glittering miter on his head, stood in a company of high ecclesiastical dignitaries, opposite a great assemblage of magistrates and officers grouped about a royal throne! After an impressive service sung to the Gregorian plain-chant, an endless procession of bishops, abbés, canons, priests, escorted the Cardinal to the great hall of the Hôtel de Ville. It was in his speech on the latter occasion that this prince of the Church, having touched one of the pinnacles

of human honor, paid tribute, it will be remembered, "to his mother, his saintly mother." However, after recounting the principal episodes of his long life with a modesty emphasized by a fervent note of thanksgiving, he ended, as was his habit, with apostolic counsel:

"In view of my age and that intimacy of the heart which unites us at this moment, you may allow me to betray a secret: like every one else, I have known joy and I have known suffering in the course of my life: but never have I been unhappy. Whether in the years of peace or in the years of war, whether in poverty or in prosperity, whether in failure or in success, at no time have I ceased to feel, deep down in my heart, a sense of tranquillity, confidence, peace.

"I should like to see all of you happy too: and since I owe you a debt of gratitude, I must try to repay you. I am eager to share with you that which seems to me the most precious of my possessions. It is a secret that opens a path to the very fountain-head of Christian serenity. It is simply this: surrender yourselves in trusting abandonment to the goodness of God."

Only ecclesiasts attended the banquet which followed at the prelate's old school, the Lower Seminary. At that gathering, the most intimate of all, the Cardinal rendered touching tribute to two bish-

ops of his diocese, Monsignor Legraine and Monsignor de Wachter, who had shared his labors over so many years. Funds had come in from a public subscription, launched by some of his friends, to erect a statue to the prelate who was surely the purest glory of the country. But the Cardinal checked that plan with a word—the contributions were diverted to an endowment for a Latin school (the Collège Cardinal Mercier) at Braine-l'Alleud in his native parish. The idea of the statue was not revived till August, 1926, and then at the instance of a committee in France.

Hardly had the ceremonies at Malines come to an end, hardly had the echoes of acclamation died away when there, in the cathedral that had witnessed his glorification, girt about with fading garlands and half-burned tapers, the Cardinal was at work again—this time on arrangements for a synod of his diocese. Nothing could have been more characteristic! Could anything induce him to postpone “the duty of the present moment”?

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If the Cardinal's great renown after the war attracted people to him from all over the world, it was not always a question of homage. He was frequently besought to throw light on perplexities or to arbitrate disputes. So, in the year 1921, he was solicited by influential personages of the Church of

England to join them in devising some means for restoring their Church to unity with Rome. Sustained efforts had been made in that direction even during the pontificate of Leo XIII. But at that time an initiative on the part of Lord Halifax, seconded by a priest of the English Mission, Abbé Portal, had been halted by a pontifical edict denying validity to Anglican ordinations. In the year 1920, however, two hundred and fifty bishops of the various Protestant communions met at Lambeth and addressed a sort of encyclical to the Christian world announcing that the Church of England would gladly enter upon negotiations with other churches with a view to arriving at Christian unity.

This move revived the hopes of Lord Halifax and Abbé Portal. But who, on the Catholic side, would be likely to smooth the path for such conferences? Cardinal Mercier was then at the height of his popularity. In agreement with Abbé Portal, Lord Halifax called on the Belgian prelate and begged him to offer his palace for a meeting between authorized representatives of Roman Catholicism, to be designated by him, and some of the best qualified members of the Church of England. Somewhat surprised at first, the Cardinal finally took kindly to the idea. Lord Halifax came back, accordingly, early in September (1921). With him were two prominent Anglicans: Dr. Robinson, Dean of

Wells, an intimate of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and Dr. Frere, thereafter Bishop of Truro. They were met by Monsignor Mercier, assisted by the Abbé Portal and by his learned vicar-general, Monsignor Van Roey. There was another meeting in the palace at Malines in March, 1923, and still a third in November of the same year: though with the Anglican group on these occasions came the celebrated Dr. Gore, former Bishop of Oxford, and Dr. Kidd, one of the most notable scholars of the famous university. Monsignor Mercier, on his side, had called in from Paris Monsignor Batiffol and the Abbé Hemmer, ecclesiasts renowned as experts in the early history of Christianity.

It was agreed from the outset that the parleys would have no official character, that they would remain private conversations in a private home; but it was known that the Archbishop of Canterbury was following them with liveliest interest, and the sympathetic attitude of Monsignor Mercier led to the belief that a rapprochement was in sight. What took place at these meetings, which have since been famous as the "Conversations of Malines"? Both sides were pledged to secrecy, at least until otherwise agreed; and, so far, the pledge has been faithfully kept. But the Cardinal himself has stated that views were exchanged in an atmosphere of friendly confidence, well calculated at some later

day to unite minds as closely as hearts already were.

"We reminded one another," he confides," that if truth has its rights, charity has its duties. It was our thought that perhaps, by talking with perfect frankness and bearing in mind that in an historical conflict protracted over centuries all the wrongs were not necessarily on one side, and by defining the issues involved on moot points, we might eliminate certain prejudices, certain feelings of distrust, dissipate certain misunderstandings, and open the road at the end of which a loyal heart, aided by divine grace, might, were it God's pleasure so, discover or recover the truth.

"In point of fact the closing hour of each of our three meetings found us more closely attached to one another, more trustful of one another, than we had been at our first contacts. . . . At the moment of separation our comrades all departed with uplifted hearts."

The Cardinal evidently did not consider it discreet to say that, captivated by his qualities of greatness, Lord Halifax had vowed him a friendship which could end only in death. One of the Anglican representatives wrote shortly afterwards:

"It was perhaps for the first time in four hundred years that Protestant and Catholic scholars had been able to sit for hours together discussing

most serious intellectual differences with absolute frankness, without the cordiality of their contacts being troubled for an instant, or their confidence in the future shaken."

To be sure, "union of hearts" and "unity of faith" are not the same thing. But through his perfect affability, his marvelous gifts of observation and understanding, the breadth of his theological and philosophical learning, Cardinal Mercier had done more, perhaps, in a few hours to lead the Church of England back to the Roman fold than the controversialists who had been trying for centuries to reduce it with hammer-blows from their ponderous apologetics.

One of the Anglicans, indeed, remarked on his return from Malines:

"It would be difficult for any one who does not live in England to appreciate the influence which the results so far obtained will have upon public opinion. Even if actual progress has been slight, I believe it will by all means mark a point of departure for further progress, and that we shall have the best of reasons for thanking God for it."

"Public opinion" did, in fact, demand a resumption of those Conversations of Malines which had given rise to such hopes; and it desired that they be again inspired and guided by the saintly Cardinal

who had succeeded in making them so agreeable and already so profitable.

Providence, however, had other plans. The worthy servant had sown the seed. For some other the joy of the harvest!

CHAPTER X

THE SAINT

CARDINAL MERCIER was first and foremost a man of faith, of ardent piety. His reverence for the Holy of Holies transpired hardly more from the dignity and majesty of his attitudes during pontifical functions, than from the fervor of his personal worship in the seclusion of his private chapel. Up at five o'clock, at all seasons of the year, even in midwinter when it was extremely cold, he would go directly to his oratory, and there, kneeling on his prayer-stool, body erect, head slightly bowed, he would pass an hour in prayer before the Host. Next came mass, which he would celebrate in the presence of his household, but slowly, gravely, always with a certain touch of tenderness that left his hearers deeply moved. And after mass he usually devoted a full quarter of an hour to more prayers of thanksgiving. The breviary he preferred to recite in the evening, walking along the paths of his palace garden in the silence of that quiet hour. Were there interruptions at such times—or distractions due, perhaps, to some noisy ceremony, or to

some tumultuous concourse—he experienced positive spiritual discomfort as though somehow he himself had been at fault. After midday luncheon came another visit to the Host before he resumed work, and still a third at six o'clock, when he spent half an hour in prayers. The modest repast at the end of the day was immediately followed by a recitation of the rosary in the chapel, the Cardinal and his household chanting in unison. Then after receiving his blessing his servants would withdraw for the night, but he himself would continue meditations for twenty minutes more, never leaving the sanctuary before ten o'clock. Thence he would retire to a plain straw mattress which was the only kind of bed he ever used.

Such fervent love of his God has as its logical corollary a tender love of his fellow-men—the Cardinal's whole life was an incessant giving of himself, either to his students or to his parishioners. Yet a hankering for studious solitude was always one of the inclinations to which he confessed. Toward the end of his career he often dreamed of passing his last years in the silence of some abbey. One may easily imagine what it actually cost him to remain for long hours, daily, during his whole career as an archbishop, at the disposition of visitors—often most humble ones, not to mention downright time-wasters. He was concerned that no one,

not even the very least of his flock, should ever cross the threshold of his palace without being granted the favor of seeing him, even though this sometimes meant delaying a meal for an hour or two. People who had never seen him before sometimes approached him with trepidation; but, the interview over, they would always go away with one feeling:

"How kind the Cardinal, and how simple! And I was so afraid at first!"

He had a predilection for "guidance of souls." Despite the heavy duties that burdened him, especially toward the end of his life, he could never bring himself to withhold from any one who implored it the ultranatural succor he dispensed as a priest. He granted long interviews to priests, theological students, working-women, ladies of society, nuns, even giving them permission to write to him, and devoting long hours, when necessary, to his replies. The spectacle of divine grace upwelling in a human soul was for him one of the supreme splendors of life. He regarded the soul as something infinitely precious to be handled with the utmost delicacy and attention. Charity toward the lowly was one of his fundamental impulses. One day while traversing the poorer sections of Malines where poverty and squalor struck the eye, he remarked to an associate:

"One of my great regrets is that I have not been able to live my whole life as curé in some poor parish where I could always be alleviating distress."

If his interest in organized relief for prisoners and deportees during the war is well enough known, few probably are aware of the intimately personal character he gave to such work, which abounded in touching incidents. On one occasion, at a time when the Germans were requisitioning all mattresses, he learned that a man and a woman were lying at the point of death in a garret in the slums of Malines.

"I must go and see them at once," he said.

And he sat at the bedside of the dying couple for a long time, consoling them, working about in the kitchen with the children whom he left well provided with money, and then visiting the German authorities to make certain the poor family would not be disturbed in its sorrow.

Whenever married couples celebrated their golden weddings in Malines, they were always invited to the Cardinal's palace. There he would engage them in friendly conversation, question them as to the incidents of their happy lives, serve them luncheon at his table, and finally send them away with some little gift as a souvenir of their archbishop. Attentions equally delicate, equally personal, he displayed for children taking their first communion. In the days before the war, he regularly received them in

his palace, "gave them a party" with refreshments, moved about among them, questioning every one, trying to reach each little soul to plant some happy memory, some bit of sound counsel, in it. Unfailingly kind and affectionate toward his servants, he always talked with them in Flemish, keeping in touch with their home interests and activities, making sure their means corresponded to their needs, cracking jokes with them familiarly without a trace of condescension or affectation, always making them feel at their ease.

For his ecclesiastical subordinates, especially for his priests, Monsignor Mercier reserved the best of his affections. The Abbé Lamal, the oldest clergyman in the diocese, became one hundred years of age in the month of September, 1925. The Cardinal planned a surprise for the old man. He invited him to a birthday dinner at the archbishopric, and then at dessert, after a repast enlivened by the rarest wit and gaiety, informed his guest that he had appointed him to an honorary canonicate. Great embarrassment for the aged curé, who had never dreamed of such a distinction! He had no money, moreover, and looked forward with some misgiving to the inauguration ceremonies in the cathedral. But, when one of his fellow-canonists suggested lending him the regalia for his new position, the centenarian was able to reply:

"Do you know, it's not necessary! His Eminence has provided me with a hood, a pectoral, and everything!"

To celebrate his jubilee more familiarly with the boys in his old Lower Seminary and in the choir-school of Saint-Rombaut, he proposed a picnic at Braine-l'Alleud. The farmers of the neighborhood insisted on providing transport and sent in to Malines a number of their auto-trucks all lettered with the advertisements of their farm products. The cardinal could not be kept from "piling in" with the others, and it was in a humble farm wagon that he appeared in his home town to celebrate his world-famous anniversary in the church of his first mass. The trucks were more crowded than ever on the return trip. One of the boys could not find a seat; but the Cardinal called to him:

"Here! There's room here! Sit on my lap!"

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Monsignor Mercier was a humble man—any number of incidents might be cited to show his humility, which was based on a keen sense of the nothingness of humanity and of the everythingness of God, of the insignificance of human things when taken apart from service of God. That was why he could accept honors without ever being dazzled by them, why he could make the most of his abilities while remaining wholly attached to God in the ut-

most simplicity of soul. Unconcerned about himself, detached from self, he was all the less concerned about worldly things, especially about worldly goods in any form. When he died the newspapers published photographs of his bedroom. Every one could see that no monastic cell ever contained plainer furniture or a harder cot than the lodging elected by this oracle of a nation, this beacon among the lights of the Church. A like poverty he would have also in his clothing, which was rarely new, and in his table which he restricted to one dish of meat and vegetables and from which wines were banished.

It would, however, be a mistake to infer that this love of humility and poverty, this aversion to magnificence, extended to things of the soul. Cardinal Mercier could not tolerate commonplace virtues. Nothing was so repugnant to him as mediocrity in inclinations, habits, conduct. Even at the age of seventy-five this aristocrat of the spirit could never understand that average virtue is all that can be expected of the average of men. Instinctively drawn to beauty, grandeur, nobility, creation, growth, reform, he credited similar passions to every one. Anything that suggested moral progress was certain to arouse his enthusiasm. A former student, who knew him intimately, wrote of him:

“His spiritual union with God purified his passions, but it did not diminish them. If his utterances

during the war had the resonance that made them so famous, that quality was due not only to the bold precision of his thinking, but quite as much and even more to the passion that glowed in all his words. He was not just a learned parson finding fault with others, nor a chief, either, giving orders to others. Over and above everything else, he was a man, a man vibrating in his whole being now with indignation, now with pity, now with revolt, a man serving truth and justice with his whole soul, and free by virtue of his very practice of self-restraint to give full play to his enthusiasms."

The Cardinal was one of those great minds who have no fear of the unknown, because they feel able to cope with any situation that may arise. He lived, one may say, at his own risk and peril all his life long. So he was always encouraging his priests to difficult undertakings, and then leaving them to their own resources to find their way out.

A humble man who dealt with the humblest on their plane, he had nevertheless an exalted conception of the dignity of an archbishop and a cardinal, and this feeling was in keeping with a very keen enjoyment of impressive ceremonials. Never was the ritual observed with more care and splendor than in his cathedral at Malines. Never did a prelate set more store on brilliancy of ornament and the happy ordering of processions. Losing himself

in humility at the moment of meditation or of prayer, he acquired at the moment of action a clear and acute sense of the authority he wielded in God's name. Sometimes, indeed, it vexed him visibly to be constrained to recognize any limits to that authority. The fact was that he had a passionate attachment to the Church, to the truth, to "souls." This passion swept everything before it, imposed itself on everything.

The Cardinal's personal aspect suggested a blend of this inner passionateness with that exquisite goodness of heart which the passing years seemed to make more and more dominant in his character. It was no longer a question of the tall, updarting and—from a distance at least—somewhat stern figure of the professor. The shoulders now drooped a little. The head was turned slightly to one side, as though in an attitude, now become habitual, of benevolent attention. The magnetic quality, surely, lay in the steady, deep-reaching gaze of his eyes which rested fixedly upon the person to whom he was speaking with a soft radiance that never faded. Gentleness, good-will—these traits one always carried away from intimate talks with the prelate. At the moment he appeared as Cardinal in the Cathedral of St. Rombaut, towering in the splendor of his purple, preceded by the imposing *theoria* of his canons and followed by the bearers of his standards, a sense

of ineffable awe would fall upon his congregations, and the words of the Psalmist would almost leap to every lip: *Ecce sacerdos magnus*—Lo, the High Priest of the Lord!

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In November of the year 1925, Monsignor Baudrillart, president of the Catholic Institute in Paris, arranged for the Archbishop of Malines one of those encounters with scholars that were particularly gratifying to the former president of the Thomist Institute. The fiftieth anniversary of the Parisian school fell on the twenty-sixth of that month and Monsignor Mercier was invited to deliver an address on the functions of Catholic universities. Cardinals Luçon, Dubois, and Touchet, the bishops supporting the institute, and a further audience of five thousand persons were to attend.

Leaving Brussels at eight in the morning, Cardinal Mercier appeared at two o'clock in the auditorium of the Trocadéro. The throng assembled gave him a delirious ovation. Paying tribute in a few graceful words to the teachers who had brought fame to the Baudrillart Institute, he went on to stress once more the importance of higher Christian education for the prestige of the Church, the honor of the clergy, and the progress of civilization. But finally the old and loyal friend of France gained the upper hand, and he could only voice

the sentiments toward the faithful ally of his country, which still filled his heart:

"In the name of the bishops of Belgium," said he, "I bring to the bishops of France, whose energy and unselfishness we honor, and in the name of all my countrymen I bring to the France we love, the homage of our abiding admiration and affection. Seven years separate us from the Armistice. In that time how many of our memories have grown dim, how many of our hopes have been disappointed! And yet there is a vision that still stands clear and sharp before our eyes: the alliance of our two peoples for the triumph of righteousness, our memory of the heroism of your soldiers, the thought that you gave fifteen hundred thousand of your children that justice might prevail over violence, honor over bad faith! This vision, this memory, this thought, are and will remain the cement that binds our two peoples together in union—that union which, according to the motto of my country, is strength."

At eight o'clock in the evening of that same day, the Cardinal attended the institute banquet, then hurried to a train, and was back in Malines again at one the following afternoon to entertain at luncheon a committee of priests whom he had summoned to a meeting. Could he have known at that time that he was already suffering from an incur-

able disease? There is no ground for thinking so. It was probably the great exertions of those two days, added to the fatigue from his routine work, that occasioned a sudden aggravation of the malady. But though the Cardinal probably did not suspect the seriousness of his condition, he had surely for some weeks been increasingly preoccupied with the thought of death.

Close associates had come upon him kneeling more frequently than ever on his prayer-stool in attitudes of humble supplication. One day, early in November, he had called to his secretary, Canon Dessain:

"Francis, are you ready? We're going for a drive in the car!"

They started off toward Braine-l'Alleud. Just as they were leaving Malines, the Cardinal discerned a bit of country that he had formerly known very well.

"Over there," he remarked, "is where we used to go on our walks when I was a student in the seminary. But the landscape looks much prettier from where we are now."

The car traversed the Forest of Soigne which bounds one side of the great plain of Waterloo. A moment later they were in Braine-l'Alleud.

As they passed the little Château du Castégier, the peaceful abode of his childhood, the Cardinal

paused and gazed upon it with sadness in his eyes. Then he went along on foot to the cemetery near by, and prayed for a long time at the graves of his father and mother.

Who can doubt it? It was a farewell pilgrimage. He felt it to be such. To a man who had come to request his attendance at a future meeting of a society, he answered:

"I shall be glad to, if I am still alive."

He realized that his strength was ebbing. Nevertheless, he continued by sheer force of will to meet his pastoral obligations, and the audiences he granted in his palace were as numerous as ever. One day an old friend, whom he had long served as confessor, arrived from Louvain. After confession the Cardinal said:

"I should like to have a little talk with you. The situation is this: I am sick. The doctors have taken an X-ray. Humanly speaking, nothing can be done—it's cancer! I'm going to make the announcement through the newspapers—to prepare the public, you understand. My friends urge me to ask God for a cure. I shall not do so. . . . And yet, you know, there are great problems that lie very close to my heart: the union of the Churches, the dogma of Mary Mediatrix, the sanctification of my clergy. Had it been God's will, I should have chosen to live a few years longer to devote myself to these impor-

tant matters. As it is, I go away with a sense of leaving things half done. . . .”

The Cardinal had for some time been displaying specially tender devotion to St. Theresa of Lisieux, and an eager desire to practise her *via parva*, her “minor method,” of self-surrender. On December 8, when the doctors had finally allowed him to suspect the graveness of his condition, he wrote to the prioress of the convent at Lisieux, a Sister of the young saint, as follows:

“My doctors have told me, to-day, that I am suffering from cancer of the stomach. In the bottom of my heart I bless the Lord for having something to offer Him, through the hands of my Mother, Our Lady of Sorrows, and in all earnestness I repeated the *Magnificat* conjoined with the canticle of my Mother in Heaven. At no time since I fell ill have I thought I could ask for a cure. I place myself in the hands of Divine Providence, and ask only this: that God derive from my poor self all glory possible, at no matter what cost to me. Nevertheless, on November 15, as I was about to conduct a Salutation for the Carmelite friars of Brussels in honor of your little saint, an idea suddenly came into my mind: that I might seek her aid. I was just crossing the threshold of the Church. On reaching my prayer-stool, I asked myself whether really I could pray for a cure (at the time I did not know

how sick I was, though I felt I might be), and I did not dare to. I made a conditional supplication, which was after all an act of self-surrender.

"I have several labors under way which, certainly, I should be eager to continue for the glory of God and for the sake of my clergy. But would not sacrifice of my personal interest in them be a still better way to serve and glorify God? God does not need any of us!

"I think, then, that I am right in holding to my attitude of self-surrender. But I think, too, that it would not be inconsistent with that attitude were I to ask you to question your little saint as to what would be best, and to suggest that you substitute for me in craving her intercession."

Monsignor Mercier had feared from the first that his malady would be incurable. The doctors did not abandon hope, and, as is customary in such cases, they advised surgery.

"If you think," he said, "that by submitting to an operation I have sixty chances out of a hundred of being able to do some useful work, then operate: otherwise, no."

And he fixed the twenty-ninth of December, himself, as the date for the operation.

Before leaving for Brussels the Cardinal desired once more to meet the students of his seminary.

The final counsel he delivered had for those young men all the solemn force of the last wishes of a dying father. His farewell concluded with words of supreme resignation:

“And now God may do with me as He will.”

The operation was not carried through to the end: the surgeons found the disease too far advanced. The best they could do was to make the patient's sufferings as bearable as possible. Stretched on a cot in a little white room similar in its simplicity to his humble chamber in Malines, he complained only of one thing: he had always slept on a bed of straw—the mattress of his iron cot was too luxurious!

His intellectual powers had not been impaired in the slightest, and he resolved to devote his remaining strength, up to his very last breath, to the interests of the Church and the affairs of his diocese. During the first days in the hospital, after hearing mass celebrated at his bedside by one of his nephews, he strove to carry out, minute by minute, the program he would have followed in his study in Malines. He gave his usual audiences, despatched routine business, signed his letters regularly. Thoughtful of others as always, he was especially desirous of showing his gratitude to Canon Van Olmen in some worthy manner before he died. Four or five days before the end, he telegraphed to the Holy See ask-

ing that the canon who had served as secretary-general to the archbishopric for forty years be rewarded with a prelacy. And he had the satisfaction of learning that his request had been granted.

Meanwhile the news of the great archbishop's illness had spread to all Catholic countries. On the eighteenth of January (1926) the Abbé Portal, one of the promoters of the Conversations of Malines, came hurrying to Brussels, after notifying his friend, Lord Halifax, of the Cardinal's condition. The next day Lord Halifax left London and hastened to the dying Cardinal. On learning of the English lord's presence in Brussels, Monsignor Mercier sent him the following message:

"His Eminence would be very happy if Lord Halifax could favor him by attending mass tomorrow morning in his room."

The visitor accepted eagerly. Entering the little white chamber the following morning, Lord Halifax sank to his knees at the bedside, kissing the hands the sick man held out to him. The Cardinal blessed him; then, raising himself in bed, opened his arms and pressed the old man to his heart. For a long while the Cardinal's head rested upon the shoulder of this friend of another faith. Lord Halifax, eighty-seven years of age at the time, was one of the noblest figures of the Anglican Church. But

he had spent his life in the cause of the union of the two churches; and it was a moving sight indeed, this final embrace of two men, both seeking on the threshold of eternity to unite their hearts in the presence of the same Heavenly Father!

Mass began, celebrated by Canon Dessain. Lord Halifax continued kneeling, absorbed in a long prayer. The sick man entered into every motion of the priest, and one could divine from his attitude in the presence of the Host that he was offering himself as a victim. After the thanksgiving Abbé Portal and his companion withdrew; but the Cardinal had set January 21 as the date for another visit.

The interview of that day was even more solemn. The Archbishop was, so to speak, to dictate his dying wishes regarding the union of the churches he so ardently prayed for. And he did make known his last hopes and final suggestions concerning the negotiations in hand. The two men agreed on the next steps to be taken, on the aid to be sought, and, in particular, on the text of a letter to be sent to the Archbishop of Canterbury. The letter read:

Brussels, January 21, 1926.

Your Grace,

In the midst of the trial which it has been God's good pleasure to send me during these recent weeks, I cannot voice the satisfaction and the consolation I have experienced at receiving a visit from our revered friend, Lord Halifax. He

has told me of the constant desire for union which you harbor. I am happy to have that assurance. It is a source of strength to me in this present hour.

Ut unum sint is the supreme desire of the Master. It is the desire of the Pope; it is mine; it is also yours. May it be realized in its fullness!

The tokens of sympathy which your Grace has been kind enough to send me have touched me deeply. I thank you for them with all my heart, and I beg your Grace to accept the expression of my most worshipful devotion.

J. D. CARDINAL MERCIER,
Archbishop of Malines.

The visitors allowed the patient to rest for a time. Then they reappeared for final adieux. Lord Halifax stepped to the Cardinal's bedside and was made to sit down. They remained in silence for long moments, affectionately holding each other's hands. The sick man finally broke the clasp; then, using his left hand to remove the pastoral ring he wore on his right, he presented the ring to his guest.

"My very dear friend," he said, "look at this ring. It bears engravings of my patrons, St. Desiré and St. Joseph. It also bears the figure of St. Rombaut, the patron of our cathedral. My family gave it to me when I was appointed bishop. I have worn it almost constantly since. When I am gone, I ask that it be given to you."

Too moved to speak, Lord Halifax made a gesture of protest.

"Please, please!" insisted Abbé Portal.

And the Anglican champion of the pact with Rome was persuaded to carry away the ring of the Catholic archbishop as a symbol of Christian union.

That was the supreme "Conversation of Malines"!

Other visitors of note gathered about the aged prelate's bed of suffering. Members of the Supreme Court and the Senate came one by one to pay their respects. We may note particularly the visit of the ex-prime minister, M. Carton de Wiart, whom the archbishop had always held in high regard. Prince Leopold, heir apparent to the royal throne, whom Monsignor Mercier had in part directed in his studies, had been absent on a voyage of exploration in the Belgian Congo. The moment he returned to Brussels, he hastened to his revered master; and the Cardinal impressed upon him in a final conversation the principles he should follow in the great task Providence had in store for him.

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A few days before his death the Cardinal addressed the following farewell to the priests of his diocese:

"During my hours of meditation, as all human hopes vanished from my eyes, leaving my soul alone with God alone, my thoughts went out to you more and more ardently; and I lived with you in unbroken spiritual converse.

"It is the priest in you I see. Deprived of the happiness of conducting holy mass myself, I associated myself in my thoughts all day long with the mass which the Sovereign Priest, Our Lord Jesus Christ, celebrates at every moment, through the agency of his ministers, on all the altars of our globe. And mass assumed in my eyes an exceptionally striking character of reality, because the sacrifice on Calvary, which it recalls, appeared to me under a tangible form, with which it was vouchsafed me to associate myself more actively and more directly than usual.

"So I said to myself that it was my duty to make you sharers in the favor that God was granting me, by enjoining you, in these hours that are perhaps my last on earth, always to conduct the holy liturgy of the mass as if you were yourselves present on Calvary, and to infuse into the ceremony all the fervent faith and devotion of which you are capable.

"My very beloved, I feel as if I had liberated my conscience in sending you this final exhortation. You became priests with a view to performing the holy sacrifice of the mass."

And the sick man now thought constantly of his priests!

"I love them so!" he kept repeating. "Tell them, please, how greatly I have loved them!"

And after his priests, his students at the seminary! Now and then, he would have a feeling he might get well again; and he liked to say at such times:

"I shall go first of all to them. . . . Oh, yes, I'll go and see them much more frequently than I have done in the past."

His body, however, which had risen at first to the limit of its strength against the spread of the disease, gradually weakened from day to day. During one of his last nights, he was assailed by a terrible thirst, without being able to moisten his lips. His thoughts turned to Jesus on the cross, and he began to murmur:

"Sitis! Sitis!"

The thirst continued implacable. He clarified his thought:

"Yea, I thirst, to lead souls unto thee, O Lord!"

And with this cry of evangelical love upon his lips, he finally got to sleep.

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On Friday, the twenty-second of January, it was evident that the end was near. Conscious, himself, of feeling weaker, the Cardinal sent for the apostolic nuncio, Monsignor Micara.

In the afternoon he said to Canon Dessain:

"What day is it?"

"It is Friday, Eminence."

"What time is it?"

"Three o'clock."

"Please summon at once my family and the vicars-general, and let us have the prayers for the dying."

Soon the members of the archiepiscopal council, the Cardinal's sister-in-law and nephews, the apostolic nuncio, the sick man's confessor, Father Van den Steen, his steward, Friar Hubert, and his faithful domestics, Virginie and Frantz, were all gathered around the bed of agony. As the prayers were read, Monsignor Mercier followed attentively, himself turning the pages of the ritual. At the Church's supreme exhortation, "*Proficiscere, anima christiana* (Go forth unto God, O Christian soul)," Monsignor Legraive hesitated for an instant, overcome by his emotion.

"*Proficiscere*," prompted his Eminence.

And he found strength, at the end, to give every one a blessing. The next day, Saturday, his nephew came in as usual to offer mass.

"The mass of Mary the Intercessor!" said the prelate.

The ceremony finished, the Cardinal invited all the priests present in the hospital to come into his room. He blessed them, and then he tenderly thanked his nurses for the care they had lavished on him.

Pneumonia, however, was progressing in his lungs and breathing was becoming difficult.

"Eminence," said Father Van den Steen, "we are going to recite the *Te Deum* to thank God for the favors He has granted you during your life."

A nod of approval indicated the dying man's acquiescence.

"*Magnificat!*" he exclaimed all at once.

They recited that holy canticle, then, in response to a second request, the *De Profundis*. Arriving at the verse: *Si iniquitates observaveris, Domine . . .*, the Cardinal raised his hands in a gesture of such pathetic supplication that tears burst from all eyes. There were tears, there were prayers, there was silence in the room of mourning, but such serenity in the face of death was at the same time a comfort and a consolation, a foretaste, as it were, of the great peace of Paradise!

At three o'clock in the afternoon, a barely perceptible sigh escaped the pale lips.

The soul of the great Cardinal stood before its God.

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Hardly had the news of his death crossed the frontiers of Belgium than the whole world was stirred, and went into mourning in one universal impulse of veneration. On all sides Cardinal Mercier was compared to the greatest bishops of history, some even ranking him with Augustine, Ambrose, and Leo. A defender, as they had been, of civic

rights and, as they had been, a great teacher, a great citizen, a great prelate all in one, he became at that moment a part of mankind's heritage of beauty.

The publication of his testament strengthened still more the feeling that the prelate had truly realized the perfection of Christian ministry. It was dated on Holy Saturday of the year 1908, the second anniversary, that is, of his consecration as bishop. Humbly accepting the sentence of death pronounced upon every earthly creature and placing his soul in the hands of his Creator, the Cardinal entrusted himself, for his eternal destiny, to the infinite merits of Jesus Christ whose cause he had so long served. He thanked the Pope for the signal favors bestowed on his sacerdotal career, and with touching insistence asked that the wrongs he might have done one day or another be forgotten. Then disposing like a true servant of the Church of the few possessions that would be found after his death, he added:

"I leave but little. I had no personal fortune, and what I have earned in the exercise of my functions or by publications I have always sought to apply to good works, striving to live, myself, from day to day. The few savings that will be found at my death are to pay my housekeeping bills and the expenses of my burial, and, whatever remains thereafter is to be used in works of charity and education. I leave to my nephews my equity in the

farmhouse at L'Hermite. Aside from that, they must, as they well know, earn their livelihoods by their own work. . . ."

After eighteen years at the head of one of the richest benefices in the world, the Cardinal had found no reason to change these arrangements. He departed from this world as poor as the humblest curé under his jurisdiction.

His will was faithfully respected, save for the disposition relating to the expenses of his burial. The government of King Albert I judged that the defender of Belgium during the war deserved the honor of a national funeral on a parity with those citizens (but three in number—Rogier, Lambermont, and General Leman), to whom the country had paid that tribute in the century of its history.

On the appointed day, representatives of the Catholic powers, qualified delegates of the allied armies, and delegates of university faculties the world over, joined the royal family of Belgium in rendering final homage to the man who had been the support of an imperiled throne as well as the proudest minister of a threatened altar. Throngs assembling from all the provinces of Belgium followed the King and the princes behind the prelate's hearse, while tear-stained eyes looked upon him as the father of the Belgian people and the savior of the nation. At Ste-Gudule in Brussels al-

most royal honors were paid the remains of the magnanimous citizen who, in that same cathedral, had proclaimed in the face of the invader the coming triumph of a liberated country.

Monsignor Mercier had expressed a wish to be buried in his own cathedral, and the clergy of Malines were calling for their archbishop. The next day, accordingly, a more intimate procession, made up primarily of priests, students, families of the war dead, and poor people whom the Cardinal had succored, escorted through the streets of the old city a bier which distinguished citizens of the diocese had volunteered to carry on their shoulders to its final resting-place. The penetrating melodies of the Gregorian *Requiem* once more enveloped the deceased prelate in their melancholy sweetness and their poetry of hope. At last, while tears fell furtively and hands were outstretched to press rosaries against its coffin, the body reached the chill darkness and the deep silence of its tomb.

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As long as Cardinal Mercier lived, the glory of the patriot and the man eclipsed, in the popular mind, the halo of the saint. Marshal Foch had said:

"He is the outstanding figure of our time."

And this judgment pronounced by one hero upon another of like stature was accepted by every one.

But the death of Monsignor Mercier brought

about a change of emphasis. Hardly had he closed his eyes when endless crowds began filing past his remains praying for his divine intercession. A spirit of supplication seemed to pervade the immense throngs that hastened to Malines, as to Brussels, to to pay him last respects. The room where he died became a place of pilgrimage, and people reported miraculous favors obtained by praying on the stone that covers his sepulchre. Six months had not passed before all Belgium was invoking him as the nation's patron saint. It was Monsignor Waffelaert, bishop of Bruges and dean of the Belgium clergy, who took the initiative toward obtaining the Cardinal's beatification. And prayers are still being recited in Belgium to that end.

THE END

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Writings of Cardinal Mercier are, in general, quoted in the foregoing from his *Œuvres pastorales, actes, allocutions, lettres*, Bruxelles, Dewit, 1924, 3 vols.

CHAPTER I

P. 3. At the time of the Cardinal's death, the Socialist anti-Clericals started a movement to purchase his birth-place and convert it into a Labor Chamber. This roused the Catholics to acquire the property.

P. 4. That the Cardinal's grandfather was a tanner has been disputed.

P. 6. Cardinal Mercier himself states that his mother was born on property at one time belonging to the Abbey of Sept Fontaines. *Œuvres pastorales*, I, p. 329.

Pp. 7-8. The citation is from the Cardinal's speech at his Sacerdotal Jubilee, printed in *Bulletin du diocèse de Malines*, vol. XIII, part IV (April, 1924).

P. 11. The Abbé Oliviers died at Diest in 1926.

CHAPTER II

Pp. 14-5. For these memories of school life, see *Œuvres pastorales*, I, p. 31.

P. 17. On the Mamelukes, see *Œuvres pastorales*, I, pp. 292-4.

P. 21. The citations are from Oudens, *Souvenirs de jeunesse*, in *Bulletin*, cit. XIII, part IV.

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P. 24. The citation is from Psalm LXXXIV.

P. 28. For the citation see Goyau, *Le Cardinal Mercier*, Paris, Perrin, 1924, pp. 21-2. The words of the Cardinal come from Psalm XLIII: *ad deum qui lætificat juventutem mean*.

CHAPTER III

Pp. 42-3. Quotation from A. Desmedt, writing in *Bulletin*, cit., XIII, part IV, p. 12.

P. 49. For quotation see Léon Noël, *L'œuvre philosophique du Cardinal Mercier*, in *Nouvelles littéraires*, Jan. 20, 1926.

P. 51. Van Weddingen's publication is *L'Encyclique de S. S. Léon XIII et la restauration de la philosophie chrétienne*, Brussels, 1880.

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Pp. 65-6. M. Passelecq writes in *La Libre Belgique*, Jan. 31, 1926.

P. 66. The Cardinal's words, quoted by Passelecq, are from his anniversary address at the Hoogstraeten Seminary, Aug. 3, 1910.

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P. 78. The Cardinal's *Rapport sur les études supérieures de philosophie* is published among his *Œuvres pastorales*.

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P. 93 ff. M. Van Cauwelaert's articles appeared in an Amsterdam newspaper, *Stemmen onzer eeuw*, Feb. 17, 1906.

Pp. 100-1. For the Pope's words, see Goyau, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

CHAPTER VI

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Pp. 125-6. These speeches are reprinted in *Œuvres pastorales*, Vol. I, pp. 22 and 26.

CHAPTER VII

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P. 143. See Caeymaex, *Bulletin*, cit., XIII, part IV, p. 80.

P. 144. The speech on oppression of the Church in France may be read in *Œuvres pastorales*, I, p. 137.

P. 145. The polemic with *Le Peuple* is reprinted in *Œuvres pastorales*, II, p. 100.

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P. 151. For the Montalembert speech, see *Œuvres pastorales*, III, p. 153. On the article in *L'Echo*, see *ibid.* I, 452.

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CHAPTER VIII

On the subject matter in this chapter see, in addition to the circular letters published in the *Œuvres pastorales*, the following: Fernand Mayence, *La correspondance de S. E. le cardinal Mercier avec le Gouvernement général allemand pendant l'occupation, 1914-18*, Bruxelles, Dewit, 1919; the article cited by Mgr. Baudrillart; the anonymous brochure *Un évêque défenseur de la cité*, Brussels Action Catholique, 1919.

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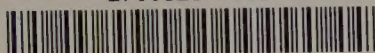
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